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BROWNIE'S TRIUMPH.

BY

GEORGIE SHELDON.

AUTHOR OF

"THE FORSAKEN BRIDE," "EARL WAYNE'S NOBILITY," "LOST—A PEARLE," Etc., Etc.

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BROWNIE'S TRIUMPH.

A Novel.

BY MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON.

But love's an essence of the soul,
Which sinks not with this chain of clay,
Which throbs beyond the chill control
Of withering pain or pale decay.

THOMAS MOORE.

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BROWNIE'S TRIUMPH.

CHAPTER I.

AN ENCOUNTER.

"Brownie! Brownie Douglas, wait a moment."

Time—three o'clock in the afternoon of the 5th of September, 1876.

Place—vestibule of the Memorial Hall, at the "World's Centennial Exposition," Philadelphia, when all the world did literally flock to behold the great sights in that city of brotherly love.

The speaker of the above sentence was a young lady of about twenty, tall, slender, and of aristocratic bearing.

The person addressed was a bright little fairy, who looked not over sixteen, yet who in reality was two years older.

She had been resting and looking at that massive statue of Washington which stands so proudly prominent there in the spacious vestibule—that grand entrance to a glorious world of art, with its royal arches and colossal pillars with their elegant carvings; its medallioned roof, its mosaic floor, and bewilder-

ing passages, replete with all the art and beauty which the heart or ingenuity of man could suggest.

She turned quickly toward the aristocratic-looking lady who had spoken.

"What is it, Aspasia? I have been waiting for you. Where have *you* been?" she asked, brightly.

"Oh, this is you, then? I thought that young lady just passing out was you—these linen dusters deceive one so."

"You look heated and weary; will you not sit down and rest?" asked Brownie Douglas, regarding the flushed face of her friend with an amused look in her dark, bright eyes.

She appeared so comically distressed.

"No, I do not care to sit down; but you do rush round so from one thing to another, that I cannot keep you in sight. I've lost my handkerchief, one of my gloves won't stay buttoned, my train will get down under my feet, and my fan and parasol are a nuisance," was the fretful reply.

The young damsel could not have been more despairing if she had had a half dozen children to look after, and every one had been lost in the labyrinth of passages.

"What a catalogue of griefs, Aspasia," laughed Miss Douglas, musically; then she added, kindly: "Here, I will button the refractory glove; there, that will stay, I know. Now for the fan, let me have it; my pocket in my underskirt is deep, and it will be perfectly safe. Here is a handkerchief to relieve your present necessities. I always carry an extra one in case of an emergency. Now I will take your parasol, and that will leave you free to manage the troublesome train."

"Thank you; you always manage everything so nicely, and

you never seem to be troubled with anything. How does it happen, I wonder?" asked Miss Aspasia, heaving a sigh of relief at being once more set right and relieved of her burdens.

"I'll tell you, Asia; I don't believe in too many 'fixings' when one is out to enjoy one's self. I abominate a train except in a drawing-room, and I should never see anything if I had so many things on me to look after as you have," replied the young girl, with a roguish glance over her companion's elaborate toilet.

And sure enough there was never a greater contrast than between those two young ladies.

One tall, fair, and languid, and dressed in the height of fashion; covered with jewels, laces, flowers, and furbelows, not to mention a three-quarters-of-a-yard train, which, with the other fixings referred to, demanded so much of her attention, that she could enjoy nothing of the wonders and beauties around her.

The other, petite and dainty; her glossy brown hair simply coiled at the back of her small head, which was crowned with a hat of dark straw, trimmed with a wreath of scarlet berries and shining dark green leaves. Her half-fitting linen ulster protected, while it did not wholly conceal her rich though simple dress of black silk, which just cleared the floor, and did not hide the "two mites of feet," encased in their tiny French boots. A pair of gray silk gloves covered her little hands, and a simple linen collar was fastened at her delicate throat by a richly-carved spray of coral, her only visible ornament.

She was quick and graceful in her movements. Her bright, restless brown eyes took in everything about her at a glance,

and were full of fun and merriment, while the glow of perfect health shone on either cheek and upon her ruby lips.

"Are you ready to go on now?" she asked her friend, as she saw the frown upon her brow fade out, at being once more set in moving order.

"Yes; and you are a jewel, Brownie. There! Oh, DEAR!"

Miss Douglas, who was about moving on, turned again at this cry of woe, and immediately a ripple of musical, irrepressible laughter broke from her scarlet lips.

There stood her friend in the act of gathering up her voluminous train, while directly behind her stood an unmistakable countryman, with one huge foot planted firmly upon the ruffles and plaitings of the beautiful skirt, securely pinning it to the floor, and making it optional with Miss Aspasia, either to go on and leave behind her that (to her) very important appendage, or wait until that herculean member should be removed.

The luckless, though innocent cause of this uncomfortable state of affairs, was gazing with wide eyes, and open mouth, at the figure of an Indian upon the trail opposite him, and wholly unconscious of the strong attachment which bound him to the fashionable belle.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Douglas, hastening to the rescue, "but will you please lift your foot?"

"Eh? What? Oh, ya-as," ejaculated the clumsy, but good-natured fellow, who was instantly frightened at finding himself growing in such a garden of finery; and he immediately stumbled off, as awkwardly as he had blundered on, while Miss Aspasia Huntington was once more at liberty.

"I declare, miss," apologized the six-footer, blushing to the

roots of his hair, "but I never saw so many wimmen a losin' their clo's off before. I hain't ben nowhere to-day but somebody's dress has ben tumblin' off on 'em, and I've stepped on't."

He moved a step or two away, still looking ruefully and apologetically at Miss Huntington; then he added, a twinkle of fun gleaming in his eyes:

"I sh'd hev a fit if 'twur me, and I'm tarnal glad I wur born to a pair o' breeches."

Miss Huntington colored angrily, and murmured something about "such insufferable insolence," whereupon the irrepressible countryman offered a piece of friendly advice.

"Grandm'th'r 'd tell ye to sew it on stronger to the bindin'—put on a *button* and make a *button-hole*. That's her way, and I don't believe *she ever lost her petticoat in her life.*"

Having delivered himself of these pithy remarks, he moved away, lifting up and setting down his huge feet cautiously, and keeping constant watch over them lest some other unfortunate female should be "losin' her clo's off," and he step on them.

At this instant a suppressed laugh greeted Miss Brownie's ear. Looking up, she caught two pairs of mirth-gleaming eyes fixed upon herself and her unfortunate companion.

Two young men were standing near, and had been amused witnesses of the comical scene just described.

On being discovered, one of them lifted his hat and bowed low to Miss Douglas, who flushed a rosy red as she returned it, and who would instantly have burst into gleeful laughter had it not been for doing violence to her companion's feelings.

As it was, however, she linked her arm in Miss Huntington's

and turned quickly away, but not before she had caught the look of unmistakable admiration with which the other gentleman regarded her.

"Who is she?" he asked eagerly of his companion, after he had watched her out of sight.

"That full-rigged craft, with all her sail crowded on, is Miss Aspasia Huntington, a Baltimore belle and heiress——"

"And the other?" interrupted the first speaker, somewhat impatiently.

He cared nothing for that doll with her finery.

"Is—hold on to your ears, my boy—Miss Mehetabel Douglas, of Philadelphia," was the startling announcement, accompanied with a smile of amusement.

"Thunder!"

"'Tis rather an imposing cognomen for such a dainty piece of flesh and blood, I admit."

"Her parents ought to be choked for giving her such a name."

"They are already defunct, and, I believe, in no way responsible for the obnoxious appellation."

"How so?"

"Her father died before she was born, and her mother at her birth; so the poor little waif fell to the tender mercies of a maiden great-aunt on her father's side, who immediately had her christened for herself, and proceeded forthwith to bring her up, after her own ideas, to inherit her million of money."

"But the other one called her Brownie?"

"Yes; no one could 'Mehetabel' that sprite. Her nurse

called her Brownie from the first, on account of her eyes, hair, and skin, for she was very dark as a child."

"Showed her good taste—the name just suits her," muttered the first speaker, absently.

"The little elf liked the pet name so well herself that she would never allow any one to call her anything else. I believe since she has grown up her schoolmates and a few of her gentlemen acquaintances, who do not feel familiar enough to address her so freely, shorten the obnoxious old maid title into 'Meta.'"

"You seem to know all about her."

"Yes, my sisters are intimate with, and very fond of her. As for myself, I always thought her a bewitching little fairy."

"She has the sweetest and brightest face in the world," was the enthusiastic reply.

"Ah, ha! Hard hit, aren't you, Dredmond?"

"So hard that I should like another of the same kind. Will you introduce me?"

"Certainly, the first opportunity."

"You say the old aunt is rich?"

"Immensely, and very aristocratic, too."

"Aristocratic, is she? The little one herself seems to be simple enough; she put on no airs. How civilly she spoke to that countryman."

"Oh, yes; she treats the rich and the poor alike. She has been very kind to some poor working girls whom I know, and yet she has a thus-far-and-no-farther way with her, when the occasion requires, which even *your* high blood could not overcome."

"There's fun in her, though; how her bright face dimpled and gleamed when that clown stood ballast for Miss Huntington."

"Ha, ha! I'd give a five-dollar note for a picture of that scene to show my sisters. They are forever being pulled up short in their career by having their trains stepped on; and I'd like them to see how ridiculous they look," replied Gordon, with twinkling eyes.

"Evidently the fellow has not been accustomed to such elongations, since he thought the 'wimmin were all losin' their clo's off,'" said Dredmond, with a chuckle.

"No; but there was a good deal of sense in what he told them about the button and button-hole arrangement."

"Egad! there was."

"And as to being 'born to a pair o' breeches,' I can sympathize fully with him there—eh, Dredmond?"

"Yes, indeed. Douglas, I believe, was the name of the little one, was it not?"

"Yes."

"It is a good one with us."

"A good one! I guess it is, my boy. Why, Miss Mehetabel, the elder, claims to be a direct descendant from the Scottish nobility."

"Aha! is that so?"

"Yes, indeed; but I warn you if you go there not to bring up the subject of genealogy, for once started upon that topic, there is no whoa until she brings up with an ancient queen."

"Pshaw! you are talking gammon now," returned the young man, impatiently.

"Indeed I am not. I have seen the genealogical tree, and I assure you she has as good blood flowing in her veins as *you* have, notwithstanding she has been an inhabitant of *plebeian America* for nearly half a century."

"Well, well, Gordon, we won't quarrel about their ancestry, there is beauty enough there, let alone blue blood."

"Yes. But I think we have discussed the subject sufficiently. Shall we go over to Machinery Hall now?"

"Anywhere you choose; but stop! What have we here?"

Adrian Dredmond stooped and picked up the shining something upon which he had almost stepped as they turned to leave the place.

It proved to be a costly cuff-button of black enamel and gold. Upon the face of it was a large D., studded with brilliants, while a tiny row of the same precious stones was set around the edge.

Turning it over, the young man discovered the word "Brownie" engraven in finest letters on the back.

"'Ye gods and little fishes,' Gordon! I've found a treasure!" and he held it up to view.

"Egad! that is so. That must have cost a cool hundred," exclaimed Gordon, examining it critically, then added: "You are in luck, my boy. It is a good omen to find something belonging to one whom you admire."

"Is it?"

"Yes; but I suppose torture would not compel you to give it up until you can put it into the owner's own little hands," and the young man laughed.

"You are right for once," returned Dredmond, lightly, although with heightened color.

"It will give me a good excuse for seeking an introduction," he added, as he carefully tucked the button into his vest pocket.

Again Gordon laughed.

"Mark my words, Dredmond, something unusual will come of your finding that trinket."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know—it is a sudden impression, perhaps, but I believe it will have an influence on your future."

"You are superstitious," replied Dredmond, with a little scornful curl of his handsome lips.

"If it should result in your carrying Miss Brownie Douglas off to the old country with you, there would be a buzzing about your ears, I can tell you; for not a few have their eye fixed already upon the dainty elf with her golden pile in prospect."

"Are you among the number, Gordon?" asked his friend, with a keen glance at the young man.

"Not I, my boy; my star shines from another quarter," Gordon replied, laughingly, though growing red in the face with the acknowledgement.

"I think then, my friend, you are getting up a little romance upon your own account, and without much of a foundation to begin with. If you were interested I should not wonder, but as there is no jealousy in the matter it seems a little singular that you should jump at conclusions thus. I fear, Gordon, I shall have to set you down as a masculine match-maker."

"Call me what you like, but I confess that I think you and

that little fairy would suit each other wonderfully well. She is just the right kind of a little woman to make a——"

"Hush, my boy; do not reveal any secrets here," interrupted Adrian Dredmond, looking anxiously around.

"Well, well, come on then to Machinery Hall; but, Dredmond, I think you are over modest about some matters."

"It is a failing which will never harm anybody," the young man replied, smiling; then linking arms in a friendly way with his companion, they wended their way to view that wonder of modern achievements, the Corliss engine, and those countless other inventions of the human brain.

CHAPTER II.

BROWNIE'S THOUGHTS.

Fair reader, do not elevate your aristocratic proboscis, nor curl your pretty lips in scorn, at the homely name of my heroine, for Mehetabel Douglas she is, and Mehetabel she must remain until the end of the chapter, although in all probability her final cognomen will emerge into some other before we get through with her. If the appellation is too offensive, you are privileged to soften it down to Miss Meta, as her gentlemen acquaintances do, and she will never refuse to answer to the name of Brownie, which, on the whole, suits her better than anything else.

In a luxurious apartment of a modern house on Chestnut street, two hours after the incidents related in our first chapter, Miss Mehetabel Douglas, the senior, might have been seen sitting in a comfortable easy-chair, while Brownie sat upon an ottoman at her feet.

The former was a woman of about sixty-five years of age, with a delicate, high-bred face, surrounded by bands of soft, silvery hair. She had dark-gray eyes, which always had a look in them as of some hope suddenly crushed out of her life, while a patient, gentle expression hovered about her thin, aristocratic lips.

Brownie had just been reading to her from "Patience Strong's Outings," and now they were talking it over together.

"She is what I call a lovely old maid, and—you're another, auntie," Brownie said, with a fond glance up into the dear old lady's face.

"You always have something sweet to say to me, dear," Miss Douglas replied, laying her hand softly upon the glossy head.

Yet the smile on her lips grew suddenly tremulous and sad, as some far-away memory seemed for the instant to return to her.

"Why is it, I wonder," pursued Brownie, reflectively, "that so much sport is made of old maids?"

"I suppose because the theory prevails, that every old maid has failed to catch a husband, and is therefore a fit subject for ridicule," Miss Mehetabel returned, a little gleam of amusement lighting up her sad eyes.

"What an absurd idea!" exclaimed the young girl, the bright color flaming into her cheeks, her eyes sparkling with indignation, and making her look like some gorgeous tropical flower in that beautiful room. "Why," she added, "Patience Strong would have made such a lovely wife for some good, noble man; and *I* don't believe but that there were plenty who wanted her. How beautiful she would have made a home, and how she would have helped her husband, with her deep, strong, sensible way of looking upon life! I wish everybody would read her 'Outings,' and try and profit by what they would learn from it."

"Yes, it is beautifully written, and would do any one good," answered Miss Douglas.

"I sometimes think the world is all going wrong," continued Brownie, with an expression of perplexity in her bright eyes.

"Why so, dear?"

"Here I know any number of people, who are no more fit to be wives and mothers than so many children; and yet every one has managed to secure a husband, while there are plenty of 'old maids' in the world, so patiently living out their lonely lives, who would make such strong, helpful wives, such wise and tender mothers."

"You ought to write a book upon the subject, Brownie, and set the world right," and Miss Mehetabel laughed outright now.

"You're laughing at me, auntie, but I think it is dreadful—so many precious, tender little souls coming into the world to be neglected by their mothers; and so many true, noble husbands plodding on their lonely way, while their wives fritter away their time on fashion and fashionable pleasures."

"But, dear, do you suppose the fault is all in the women?" asked the old lady, to draw her out still further, and tenderly scanning the flushed, earnest face.

"Perhaps not, auntie. I don't know much about the men anyway, but I do believe if the women were less selfish and more gentle and loving, there would be fewer bad men in the world."

"That is true, dear, in one sense—selfish mothers make selfish children, and so the world goes on."

"Now, auntie, *you* would have made such a *splendid* wife for some good man; and you ought to have had at least a dozen children. What a charming household it would have been, for you would have governed so wisely and so well. I don't believe nature ever intended you for an old maid."

A spasm of pain contracted the old lady's brow, but she replied, quietly:

"Perhaps not; yet there is, doubtless, some wise reason for it. What would have become of you, dear, if I had had a large family of my own?"

"Oh, I should have only made up the *baker's* dozen, and it seems such a pity that so much native talent should all be lavished upon one poor little waif like me," Brownie said, with a little laugh.

"If I had had the number you assign me, dear, and they had all proved the blessing to me that you have been, I fear it would have been too much happiness for one human being; and yet——"

The old lady did not conclude her sentence, but heaved a deep sigh, while unshed tears stood in her beautiful eyes.

"Auntie, why *were* you an old maid? I don't understand it—it must have been no one's fault but your own."

"My own fault, Brownie! You don't know—child, you don't know," cried Miss Mehetabel, sharply, while a deep, dry sob, that was almost a groan, burst from her lips.

Brownie was startled at her deep emotion. She had spoken lightly, and with no thought that she was probing an old wound.

She sprang up quickly, and, seeing the fair old face above

her almost convulsed with agony, she twined her arms about her neck, saying, remorsefully:

"Auntie, dear, forgive me! Have I touched some hidden spring of sorrow? I would not have wounded you so for the world."

She laid the aged face upon her bosom, and smoothed the silvery hair with a tender hand, while her bright, sweet face grew clouded and anxious.

There was an unbroken silence in that room for many minutes.

Miss Mehetabel was too agitated to speak, and struggled hard to regain her self-control, and when at length she had in a measure succeeded, she became absorbed in some engrossing memory or reflections, while the loving girl bending over her would not disturb her, lest the wild burst of sorrow should return.

At last the old lady looked up into her face with a mournful smile, and her aged lips trembled with the question:

"Dear child, would you like to read a sad page in an old woman's history?"

"No, dear auntie, do not talk of anything that gives you pain. Forgive me for speaking in a way that should recall anything to distress you," said the young girl, sadly.

"You did not think to pain me, and I am glad now that the conversation has taken this turn, for I would like you to know something of what my past has been."

"Let us wait until some other time—you are tired and ought to rest now," pleaded Brownie, recoiling from a revelation which she believed would be painful.

"No, Brownie, something prompts me to tell you now, and I will obey the call. The book of my life is almost written, love, and it will do me no harm to review it once more before it is closed forever. I have borne my sorrow alone for forty-five years, and it seems as if it would do me good to breathe it to some one who would give me sympathy, and remember it tenderly when I am gone."

Brownie's little hand fluttered down upon Miss Mehetabel's lips, and the tears sprang to her eyes.

She could not bear to hear her talk thus.

"Where is Aspasia?" the old lady asked, presently.

"She is in her room. She had so much to carry around today at the exposition that she is wearied out, and is taking a nap to refresh herself," and Brownie laughed at the remembrance of Miss Huntington's misfortunes.

"She does rig herself out abominably. I am glad you are more simple in your taste, my dear; you will get along through the world more comfortably and happily for it."

"I suppose Aspasia thinks there is no other way by which she can show her wealth, auntie."

"Nonsense, child; the true lady, accustomed to luxury, will be recognized anywhere in the plainest dress; and you, dear—though I say it myself—can better afford to make a fashion-figure of yourself than Aspasia Huntington, notwithstanding she is called an heiress," and Miss Mehetabel's eye lighted with a gleam of pride at the announcement.

"But I do not care for fashion or style as she does, auntie; besides, I think it a foolish way of spending money," Brownie answered, thoughtfully.

"I shall have no fear that my fortune will be wasted; you will be very rich, Brownie, when I am gone. I have made my will, and you are to have everything."

Ah! had she but known the *legacy* which she would leave the young girl, she would not have spoken so confidently of the future.

"Let us not talk about it, auntie; I don't like you to speak about going away from me. I should be desolate without you, if I had ever so much money," and the bright face wore a look of pain.

Miss Douglas drew the shining head down to her, and kissed the sweet lips.

"Well, well, so be it, though it must come sooner or later; but we will talk no more of it now. You are very precious to me, darling, and your love has been the only brightness of my life for the past eighteen years," she said, softly. "Go lock the door," she added, after a moment, "so that we may be uninterrupted; then draw a chair beside me, and I'll tell you how I came to be an old maid. It may be a lesson that will do you good."

Brownie glided softly to the door and turned the key. Then she drew a low rocker and seated herself beside Miss Douglas, while a feeling of solemnity took possession of her, as she realized that a hidden page of life was about to be turned back for her to read.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUNT'S STORY.

"You know who the Douglases are?" began Miss Mehetabel, bracing herself up, with a look of pride.

"Oh, yes; you have always given me to understand that they belonged to a very honorable race."

"An honorable race indeed! Why, child, they are the descendants of a *queen!*—a Scottish queen! Lady Margaret Douglas was the daughter of Queen Margaret Tudor, and back to her we can trace our ancestry. Never forget it, child—never forget that you are descended in a direct line from the royalty of Scotland."

One could judge something of what Miss Douglas had been in youth, as she sat there inspired with the pride of her race—her form drawn proudly erect, her eyes glowing with the fire of twenty rather than sixty, and the flush of conscious dignity upon her fair old face. Her delicate, flexible features were all lighted up with the remembrance of her youthful days, and of former glory, when in the old country she was known and acknowledged as the "descendant of a *queen!*"

She must have been very stately and very beautiful!

Brownie did not reply to her last remark, for it was a hobby with her proud kinswoman, and once thoroughly started on the

subject, she knew the family tree would have to be brought out, and the wearisome task of tracing the Douglas race for three long centuries would have to be rehearsed. So she wisely held her peace.

"Yes, the descendant of a queen!" she repeated; "and many of our ancestors intermarried with the English nobility, so that to-day, Brownie Douglas, there runs no better blood in any veins than in yours and mine.

"Before I left the old country, dear, I mingled with the proudest circles of the land. I was presented at court, and during a brilliant London season I was introduced to the young Lord of Dunforth, son of the Fifth Lord of Firth.

"His first name was Royal—they called him Roy—and he was rightly named, for he was fit to be a king!

"From the first hour of our meeting we loved each other, and we were betrothed, by the consent and approval of both his friends and my own, after an acquaintance of six months."

"You, auntie, betrothed to a real, live lord! How romantic!" exclaimed Brownie, excitedly, and deeply interested in the event.

"Yes, a real, live lord," repeated Miss Douglas, smiling; "but then lords are no more than any other men, excepting their title. Our marriage was to be delayed for a year, until Roy should complete his course at Oxford, when he would come in possession of a fine estate in Essex.

"Brownie, the good book tells us, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but Me;' but I disobeyed that command. I worshiped Royal, Lord of Dunforth, with all the strength of my nature—and no Douglas ever possessed a weak one, I can tell you.

"We exchanged letters frequently, and the words he penned were like a feast to my soul. I have them now, every one, and they are all that I have left of the love, the glorious love, which I once fondly hoped would brighten my life to its end."

The old lady became so agitated that she could not go on, as all the blighted hopes of her youth came crowding up before her.

She bowed her white head upon her withered hands, her body swayed to and fro like a broken reed, while great tears coursed their way over her pale cheeks and dropped between her fingers.

Brownie wept in sympathy, and with her dainty handkerchief she wiped the pearly drops, one by one, as they fell.

"Don't try to tell me any more, auntie," she pleaded, in distress, fearing that the excitement would make the old lady sick.

"Yes, yes; it will lighten the burden, and I shall not break down again," and she straightened herself resolutely.

"During the past few days I have been living over all those bright days, together with the bitter agony that followed, and my heart will burst unless I relieve it," she added.

"In the same circle in which we moved, there was a very handsome girl, by the name of Lady Helen Capel. She belonged to a very wealthy and honorable family, and it was said that before Lord Dunforth was introduced to me he used to pay some attention to her. From the very first of my acquaintance with him she evinced an intense dislike toward me.

"Report said that she wanted to win him for herself, and I

believe in my heart that was why she was so haughty and disagreeable whenever we met.

"Lord Dunforth finished his course at Oxford with great honor to himself, and preparations were bugun for our marriage, which was appointed to take place just before the Christmas holidays.

"One evening we attended a ball given by Helen Capel's aunt, Lady Ruxley.

"On entering the ball-room I had given my card to Roy to fill out such sets as he wished for himself, and then as others were introduced to me, they put their names in the blanks that were left.

"Once I noticed Helen Capel in earnest conversation with her brother, and that every now and then they turned their glance upon me. Still, at the moment, I gave the circumstance no thought. Afterward I knew why it was.

"Soon after, Charles Capel came up with a handsome but rather rakish-looking gentleman, whom he introduced as the Count de Lussan. Roy had left me for a few minutes to speak to some one he knew, or what followed never would have happened.

"The stranger immediately requested the pleasure of dancing with me, and I innocently assented, never for a moment dreaming that any one would be present in Lady Ruxley's rooms with whom it would not be proper for me to dance.

"I gave him my card, and he put his name down against a waltz, while a peculiar smile curled his lips.

"Not many minutes after Helen Capel sauntered toward me, and sat down by my side.

"For the first time in her life she was gracious to me, and, bearing her no ill-will, I chatted freely with her for quite a while.

"'Have you danced much?' she asked, holding out her hand for my card.

"'Several times,' I returned, with a smile, as I gave it up to her.

"She ran her eyes hastily over the names, and I could see her scowl every time she read Roy's. Then suddenly looking up, she exclaimed, aghast:

"'Why, Miss Douglas, will his lordship permit you to dance with the Count de Lussan?'

"The form of the question nettled me exceedingly, and I replied, somewhat haughtily:

"'His lordship will permit me to dance with whomsoever I choose, Miss Capel.'

"She laughed a silvery, wicked laugh, and fixing her bold black eyes upon me, said, in an exasperated way:

"'Pardon me, Miss Douglas, but I do not *believe* Lord Dunforth, who is very arbitrary when once his will is aroused, will permit his betrothed to dance with any one who bears the reputation which Count de Lussan bears.'

"'But your own brother introduced me to him, Miss Capel!' I exclaimed, indignantly.

"'Charles? I'm astonished at him; but I presume the count asked him, and he did not like to refuse. Why, he is a notorious blackleg, and how he ever gained admission here, is more than I can tell.'

"I was startled at this intelligence, but I would not show it

before her, nor yield one iota; and looking up at that moment, I saw Lord Dunforth and Count de Lussan both approaching me.

"Miss Capel remained by my side, evidently desirous of seeing the little game played out.

"The count reached me first, and bowing low, offered me his arm, saying his turn had come.

"I glanced nervously into my lover's face as I hesitatingly took the count's arm, fearing that all was not right, and my heart stood still, as I noted its expression of blank dismay and stern displeasure.

"He hastened forward, and taking my card, hastily scanned the names upon it, and his brow grew dark with wrath, as he read Count de Lussan's against a waltz.

"Bowing haughtily to my companion, he said, with compressed lips:

"'Excuse me, but I must ask you to release this lady from her promise to dance with you.'

"The count's eyes flashed fire, and his face grew crimson, as he answered, coldly:

"'I cannot do so, my lord, except at the lady's own request.'

"'She does request it through me—by my desire,' replied Lord Dunforth, sternly.

"'Miss Douglas, do you command me to release you?' asked the count, turning to me with that same disagreeable smile upon his lips that I seen there when he had written his name against the waltz.

"'Tell him yes, Meta. I cannot allow it, and will give you

my reasons the first opportunity,' whispered my lover, in pleading tones, in my ear.

"I was on the point of yielding. Oh, why was I so blind that I did not? I had half withdrawn my hand from the count's arm, when I heard a low, mocking laugh near by.

"Glancing up, I saw Helen Capel watching every motion, catching every word and tone, a smile of mocking triumph on her handsome face.

"In an instant I remembered my boast to her, that 'Lord Dunforth would permit me to dance with whomsoever I chose,' and in that fatal moment I resolved to show her my power over him; that I had a will of my own.

"Lifting my head a trifle haughtily, I said:

"'My lord, I have promised Count de Lussan that I will waltz with him, and I cannot break my word.'

"'Meta, Meta, don't do it!' he begged, in a whisper.

"'I must!' I answered, coldly.

"'I command you not!' he said, in a tone which the count caught, and curled his lip in scorn.

"I bowed coldly, all the antagonism in my nature aroused by his command, then turning to my companion, I said:

"'The music is inspiriting, count. I am ready,' and encircling my waist with his arm, he whirled me into the midst of the giddy dancers.

"I had always loved to waltz; but, oh! how I have hated it since then. And this is the reason, dear, why I would never allow you to learn. It is not decent for young girls to be encircled in the arms of men of whom they know nothing.

"The count was one of the finest dancers I have ever seen;

he was like a feather upon the floor. That waltz was the very poetry of motion to me—I forgot everything; I forgot with whom I was dancing, I forgot my lover's displeasure, and remembered nothing but that airy, circling round and round until the music suddenly ceased.

"Then I became aware of strange, surprised glances following us; whispered words of censure greeted my ears, and a tremor of uneasiness took possession of me, which merged into absolute terror when I reached the spot where Lord Dunforth still stood.

"He was like a piece of statuary, his noble brow overcast, and his fine lips white and set as if in pain.

"Count de Lussan released me, thanking me for the great pleasure I had given him, and then moved away.

'My lover did not speak one word to me until the music struck up again, and the attention of the people around us was attracted in other directions.

"He stood motionless, his hand appearing to rest carelessly upon the back of the chair in which I sat; but I could feel it tremble with the mighty power which moved him, and I felt congealed to ice. I was to have danced with him that set, but he did not ask me, and when at length he bent over me, and whispered in my ear, his words did not serve to reassure me.

"'Will you oblige me by withdrawing from the company?' he asked.

"I arose at once and took his arm.

"He led me directly to the dressing-room.

"'I will wait for you while you get your wraps,' he said.

"'Oh, Roy, what have I done?' I exclaimed, in deep dis-

tress at his coldness, my heart thrilling with a terrible pain.

"'You have disgraced yourself and me—the Count de Lussan is the lowest blackleg in London.'

"Imagine, if you can, how those stern, cruel words pierced me. All the more, because I had been told before I had committed myself, concerning the character of the man with whom I had made myself so notorious. And I had done this dreadful thing just for the sake of showing a vicious girl that I had a will of my own. And now, when all too late, I realized that it had been but a cunning plot between Helen Capel and her brother to ruin me. I afterward discovered that she had gained an entrance for the Count de Lussan to her aunt's ball, and they had arranged between them to tempt me into this indiscretion, knowing full well that Lord Dunforth would not tolerate anything of the kind.

"I lifted my eyes and searched my lover's face after those, to me, words of doom. It was as inflexible as marble, not a gleam of love, kindness, or forgiveness. He was like a stern judge pronouncing sentence upon me, and the thought burst like lightning upon me, searing my very soul—

"I had lost him forever! and throwing out my hands toward him, I sank with a low moan of agony at his feet before he could even put forth an arm to save me."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LEGACY OF JEWELS.

"In falling, my head struck against the base of a pillar, cutting a severe gash in my forehead, which, with the blow, nearly cost me my life—there is the scar now, dear."

The old lady lifted the silvery hair from her forehead, revealing a white seam about an inch in length.

Brownie reached over and pressed her red lips upon it. The act nearly unnerved Miss Mehetabel again.

"I was taken to a room in the house," she went on, "put to bed, and a physician sent for, but it was hours before I recovered consciousness, and the doctor said I had had a marvelous escape.

"It was several days before I was able to sit up, for the shock of the fall had affected my whole system, and all this time Lord Dunforth had not been near me. At least, so Lady Ruxley said when I inquired for him. My heart cried out after him. I longed with a mighty longing to have him forgive me, and take me back into his great, strong love again. Surely, I reasoned, he will not allow one error, especially when he understands how it happened, to ruin our whole future; he *must* forgive me—I would plead so eloquently that he would not be able to resist me.

"I lay for days listening, trying to catch the echo of his footsteps, and once or twice I fancied I heard it, and the deep, rich tones of his voice, asking some eager question. Then the sound would die away, and I thought my ears and my longing heart had deceived me, for he never came, and I was too proud and hurt to send for him.

"At last one day my maid brought me in a little note.

"I saw and recognized the handwriting as soon as she opened the door.

"'Give it to me, quick!' I cried, my heart bounding at the sight of it.

"With trembling fingers I tore it open and read these cold, formal words:

"'Will Miss Douglas kindly favor me with an interview, if she is strong enough to endure it? and oblige

"'ROYAL DUNFORTH.'

"I nearly shrieked at the icy words—my nerves were still unstrung, and they hurt me as nothing else had ever done before.

"Was he coming to blame me—to charge me with the disgrace I had brought upon him and myself, and then cast me off forever? Had I sinned past all forgiveness? I asked myself again and again.

"Ah, no, it could not be—he *must* forgive me; he would overlook that one night's error, and take me back into his deep, strong love again. I could not live without it. I could not breathe without the sunshine of his presence. I would throw myself at his feet, and sue for pardon as a condemned criminal would plead for his life.

"I seized a pencil and wrote:

"'Yes, come at once, if you can forgive your repentant

"'META.'

"I folded and enclosed it in an envelope, without sealing it, and giving it to the maid, told her to carry it down to Lord Dunforth, who, she said, was awaiting an answer.

"I did wrong to send him a written reply. I ought to have gone to him, even if I had been obliged to crawl upon my hands and knees to do so; but I was weak—I had not yet left my room, was able only to sit up for an hour or two at a time, and I thought, of course, he could come to me. I never dreamed of treachery."

"Treachery, auntie!" exclaimed Brownie, who was intensely interested in the sad tale.

"Ah, treachery, child, as you will soon see, and I might have known it, too, had my wits been about me.

"The maid came back almost immediately.

"I looked up in surprise as she entered.

"'Why are you back so soon?' I demanded.

"'I met Miss Helen on the stairs,' she answered, 'and she told me Lord Dunforth was in the drawing-room, and she would take the note in to him.'

"I could not say anything, but I did not like it even then; I did not like Helen Capel to be the bearer of any message from me to my lover. I liked her far less since the ball than I had ever done before, for I believed she had tried to make all this trouble for me. I had refused to see her during my sickness, although she had called a number of times, and had also sent me beautiful flowers.

"I lay two hours, listening for my loved one's elastic tread on the stairs. I had not a doubt but that he would obey my message and come to me. But at last I heard gay voices in the hall, then his deep, rich tones gravely saying 'good-morning' to some one, after which came the sound of closing doors, and I knew he had gone.

"With a heart like lead, I bade the maid go down and ask Miss Capel if she had given Lord Dunforth my message.

"She came back saying that Miss Capel said, 'Certainly, she had given his lordship the message.'

"Then it came to me that I had made a condition in my note—I had said *if* he could forgive me, to come to me.

"He could not forgive me, therefore he would not come, and, without even a word of farewell, he had left me forever.

"I cannot tell you all that I suffered, Brownie. I know I raved against the injustice of Heaven in permitting such sorrow to come upon me, and in shutting out the light of my life from me. I cursed Helen Capel, her brother, and the Count de Lussan for their part in the drama; but most of all, I cursed myself for having allowed myself to become their dupe.

"I insisted at once upon returning to my own home, where I was again prostrated, and for another long month lay sick and weak, and praying to die; and thus my wedding-day passed. Oh, who can tell the blackness of despair which came over me as that day came and went. I was to have been a happy wife, proud and blessed in the love of a noble man. Instead, I was a heart-broken girl, wailing out my life in loneliness. A homeless beggar in the street was not more wretched than I.

"Another month went by, and I was at length thought able

to ride out; and one day my father took me out to Richmond Park, where we spent an hour or two driving about.

"On our return, when about two miles from the city, I saw Lord Dunforth's elegant carriage, with its span of black horses, approaching. He was driving himself, and a lady whom I did not know sat by his side.

"With my brain on fire, and my heart quivering with pain, I sat like a statue, watching his every movement, noting his every expression.

"He was so busily engaged in conversation with the strange lady that he did not notice whom he was about to meet until we were almost opposite them, then, glancing up, he caught my eyes fixed upon him.

"He gave a sudden start, which I could see shook his whole frame, while an expression of pain passed over his features. His face grew pale as my own, and he leaned forward with an eager look in his eyes, as if about to speak. Oh, if I had only smiled, if I had but spoken *one word*, all would have been well even then; but I did not, and drawing himself erect again, he inclined his head with haughty grace, and was gone.

"I did not realize what my own manner toward him had been. I only was conscious that he, my beloved, was near—that I was looking upon his face and into those dear eyes once more. I could not move, I could not speak, and some distance was between us before I realized that I had given him the cut direct—had only looked with a fixed stare in his face, consequently had no right to expect anything more than the haughty bow which he had given me, and which had again crushed my heart.

"Many times I longed to write him a line, begging him to come to me, if only for an hour, that I might hear him say he forgave me; many times I had the pen in my hand to do so, but pride whispered, 'you are sick and feeble, it is his place to come to you, not yours to beg his presence;' and so we, who to-day might have been united and loving, were parted forever.

"My parents decided soon after to take me abroad, as the physician said my health would never improve unless I had some change, and we set sail for the United States early in May.

"In July, after our arrival here, they both sickened and died very suddenly, and I was left alone a stranger in a strange country.

"I could not return to England, where I had suffered and lost so much, and I could not remain here alone. Accordingly, I wrote my brother, begging him to take his family and come to me. I had often heard him say he would like to live in America. I commissioned him to settle the estate, as far as I was concerned, to the best of his ability, and bring me the proceeds when he came.

"To my great comfort, he consented to my request, and in October arrived in New York with his wife and child—their son, who was your father, Brownie.

"We decided to make our home in this city, having spent some time in traveling, and finding no other place we liked so well; and here they lived until God called them, and here I have lived ever since.

"Five years after our arrival we heard that Lord Dunforth

had married Helen Capel's cousin, Lady Leonie Herford, and just three months later *I learned that but for Miss Capel's treachery I might have been his wife.*"

"Oh, auntie! only just three months after his marriage!" exclaimed Brownie, in deep distress.

"Yes, dear, those three months were all that stood between me and my future happiness; but what matters it if it had been but a day, or an hour even, if it were that much *too late?*

"I found out that Miss Capel never gave that note of mine to Lord Dunforth, but told him instead that I utterly refused to see him then and ever after.

"When he met me driving afterward, and I did not even recognize him, but sat so cold and indifferent, he was confirmed in the truth of her statement. I was told that it was a terrible blow to him, for he loved me, and would have made me his wife notwithstanding all that had passed. He left England almost immediately after we sailed for America, and did not return until about a year before his marriage."

"Who told you all this, auntie?"

"A friend of his lordship told my brother, who met him while he was traveling in this country. He did not know the truth of the matter regarding the note I sent, until brother told him, and I do not suppose Lord Dunforth knows to this day of Helen Capel's treachery, or that she was the cause of our separation.

"Now, darling," concluded Miss Mehetabel, with a little tremulous smile which was sadder than tears, "you know the reason why I am an old maid."

"Auntie, *auntie*, it is the saddest story I ever heard in my life," sobbed Brownie, as she kissed her trembling hands.

"Yes, dear, it is the saddest *life* that ever was lived," wailed the old lady, wringing her hands. "I have loved to idolatry for forty-five years, and to know that the love of a noble man, the bliss of a perfect home, the love of precious children, the sound of pattering feet and blithesome voices, might all have been mine, but for that proud, willful act of my life, is almost more than I have been able to bear."

"Dearest, don't let it break you down so," cried the young girl, as this wild wave of anguish swept over Miss Mehetabel, making a child of the stately, the grave, and dignified old lady.

Brownie wound her arms about her neck, and drew the white head upon her bosom, kissing away her tears, and murmuring soothing words to quiet her.

"The fountains of life are breaking up, my pet," she said, when at length she had succeeded in regaining something of her usual composure, "or I should never have yielded thus to my grief before another. But I have had no ray of sunlight in all these forty-five years but you, my darling. I believe God sent you to save me from going *mad* with the fire which was consuming my brain. He took your father and mother, and gave you to me—made you first my burden, then my blessing, to save me and make me realize that life still held some duties, if no joys."

"Did Miss Capel ever marry?" Brownie asked.

"Yes, the year following Lord Dunforth's marriage; but I have forgotten the name of her husband."

"If you had discovered her treachery before his marriage would you have sought a reconciliation?"

"Certainly, dear, for I know that he loved me with a love as true and strong as my own for him, and this makes me think to caution you, never to let *pride* stand in the way of your happiness. If I had hushed the voice of pride, and written his lordship to come to me, when I so longed to do so, all would have been well even then."

"I believe I *should* have tried it, had I been in your place, auntie," said the young girl, thoughtfully.

"You *think* you would now, knowing all the circumstances. I know you are a bright, winsome darling, but you are a Douglas, notwithstanding, and have their proud spirit, which is as set as the 'eternal hills,' but I beg of you, do not ever allow it to ruin your happiness. If you do wrong, it can never harm you to say 'forgive me.' If there ever comes a misunderstanding, which a word can set right, speak it, though it galls you to the soul," said Miss Mehetabel, earnestly.

"I should like to have known Lord Dunforth, auntie—I mean I should like to see the man whom *you* would choose," the young girl said, musingly, and not heeding the advice just given.

In after months she remembered it.

A look of keen pain swept over the old lady's face, but she had fully recovered her self-possession now.

"Go and bring me a little ebony box, dear, which you will find in the third drawer of my dressing-case," she said.

Brownie arose to obey, and soon returned, bringing a beautiful casket about twelve inches square and eight deep. It was

inlaid with pearl and gold, in lovely designs, and was quite heavy for anything so small.

Miss Mehetabel took a delicate chain from her neck, to which was attached a tiny golden key.

Her hand shook as with the palsy, as she inserted the key in its lock.

"This has not been opened for forty years, my child, and I feel as if I were about to look upon the dead," she said, in a voice that shook, despite her efforts to control it.

"Don't open it now, then, Aunt Meta. I cannot bear you to live over this sorrow for me," Brownie answered, a feeling of awe stealing over her at Miss Mehetabel's words.

"I will look once more before I die, dear, and I wish to tell you about these things, which are to be yours when I am gone."

She turned the key as she spoke, and lifted the jeweled cover, and Brownie uttered a cry of delight at the sight which greeted her eyes.

There, upon their blue velvet bed, gleamed such jewels as she had never seen before.

In the center lay a beautiful diamond necklace, with ear-pendants to match. Then there was a coral and diamond cross, with a hair ornament, in the shape of a butterfly, to match. A tiara composed of pearls, opals, and diamonds, with a cross for the neck. Rings of pearls, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds; one, a large pearl, surrounded by six small, pure diamonds, Miss Mehetabel took up tenderly in her hand.

"This," she said, while her lip quivered, "Lord Dunforth put upon my finger when he told me of his love. It has never

been there since *that day*, when I believed he went away from me forever of his own accord. These other jewels were given me in honor of my approaching marriage, but I have never worn any of them, excepting this coral and diamond cross which Royal gave me, and which I wore to that ball, where I lost everything dear in life. I have no use for them, and henceforth they are all yours, dear, to do as you like with—if ever you feel that you can wear them for my sake, I wish you to do so."

"Oh, auntie, they seem too precious for *me* to wear; they seem like something sacred to me," the young girl said, reverently, while her eyes lingered upon their beauty.

"Then you will prize them all the more, dear, and I am glad that it is so—you will never wear them lightly, and they will never grow valueless to you. You have the cuff-buttons already which Lord Dunforth gave me at the same time with the coral cross."

"Are those—did you give them to me?" stammered Brownie, feeling that she had almost been sacrilegious in wearing anything so precious, and not know it.

"Yes, dear, they were the only articles of his giving which I ever permitted myself to wear, and then only a few times. So, feeling that they ought to do somebody some good, I had them marked for you for your last birthday."

"I shall never wear them again without feeling that they are tenfold more precious than ever before," the young girl said, with starting tears.

She little knew that even then one of them was lost. She

had removed her linen ulster upon returning home, and left her cuffs hanging in it.

Miss Mehetabel now lifted the velvet bed, and laid it with all its glittering wealth upon the table near which she sat. Beneath it lay a locket of blue enamel and gold, studded with diamonds; a little bunch of dried flowers, a crumpled card, and a pair of soiled white kid gloves.

"These," Miss Mehetabel said, touching the flowers, "I wore in my hair that night, fastened with the butterfly; and these are the gloves—they bear the last touch of his hand. This is the card on which the Count de Lussan wrote his name."

She took up the locket with a tender touch.

"This contains the face of the one man on earth to me. Open it, dear—I cannot."

Brownie took it, the great tears rolling over her flushed cheeks. It seemed so inexpressibly sad, and as if she too were about to look upon the face of the dead.

She pressed the spring and it flew open. From one side of it there gazed up at her the dark, noble face of a man about twenty-five years of age.

It was indeed a kingly face (rightly named Royal), having a broad, thoughtful brow, surmounted by curling masses of dark hair. Eyes deep and fathomless as a forest lake, a nose straight and aristocratic, and lips upon which firmness and gentleness blended, while from his decided chin fell a full, silken, curling beard.

The fair girl gazed upon it for several moments in silence, then heaving a deep sigh, she said, softly:

"He was *grand*, auntie!"

A tremulous smile quivered on Miss Mehetabel's lips at this tribute to her old-time lover, and she held out her hand for the locket.

Brownie gently laid it on her palm, then, rising, she went to the window and looked out, to hide her tears and give the old lady an opportunity to gaze, unobserved, upon that face, which she had not seen, only as it was stamped upon her heart, for forty-five weary years.

When at length she heard her shut it with a sigh that was almost a groan, she came back and stood silently by her side, while she replaced the jewels, locked the casket, and clasped the chain with its golden key again on her neck.

"Put it away," she said, with white lips, "and when I am dead come and get this chain and key, and wear it around your own neck as long as you live."

Little did that fond old lady dream of the pain and shame which that legacy of jewels would bring upon the fair girl whom she so loved.

Brownie returned the box to its place, wondering if anything so wondrous sad as the story to which she had just listened would ever come to mar her future.

"Now go, dear, and dress for tea—I am tired and would rest a while; when the bell rings I will come down," Miss Mehetabel said, trying to smile as cheerfully as if they had been having only a social chat, and her heart-strings had not been strained to their utmost tension.

Brownie carefully drew down the window-shades, then kissing her aunt softly upon her withered cheek, noiselessly withdrew.

CHAPTER V.

LAYING DOWN LIFE'S BURDEN.

Supper time came.

Brownie and Miss Aspasia Huntington, in their fresh, crisp muslins, with bright eyes and faces, descended to the dining-room, where a tempting little tea was laid for three. The Sevres china contrasted daintily with the crimson cloth; the cut-glass goblets and fruit-dishes, with their silver covers, gleamed like diamonds, and the polished silver service gave an added air of elegance to the richly-spread board.

"Where is auntie? Has she not come down yet?" Brownie asked of the dignified waiter.

"No, miss," was the courteous reply.

"Ah, here she comes," continued the young girl, hastening forward to lead Miss Mehetabel to her seat.

"Are you feeling ill, auntie? You are looking pale," she added, anxiously, noticing the wax-like appearance of her face.

She did, indeed, look uncommonly white, and somewhat wan.

"No, dear, I feel as well as usual," smiled the old lady; and immediately she began a lively chat with Miss Aspasia, for she saw that Brownie feared that their afternoon's conference had been too much for her feeble strength.

She exerted herself to the utmost to make the hour pass

pleasantly. She told stories of her early youth—droll little adventures which had happened to her as a girl—and which soon set them both laughing heartily; and for the once, the stately dame seemed to forget her years, threw off her stateliness, and became almost a girl again herself.

They lingered long over their cozy tea, little dreaming that they would never sit thus together again; and Brownie, in the loneliness and desolateness which followed, often looked back to this hour, and dwelt fondly upon the memory of it.

The western sun streamed in through the large bay-window, lighting up the rich room and the elegantly-laid table; touching the bright heads of those young girls—the one so golden, the other so richly brown—caressing them in their beauty, as if they had been some choice lovely flowers. It rested softly upon the aged face and silvery locks of Miss Mehetabel; and, as Brownie looked up and noticed it, and the happy content shining from her mild eyes and resting on her smiling lips—from which every trace of pain had now vanished—it seemed to her almost as if an angel had opened the gates of Paradise, just to let down a ray of glory, as if in holy benediction upon her, before she should go out into the great unknown.

Ever afterward, when she thought of her dear aunt—mother, as she sometimes called her—this hour, the happy light in those kind eyes, the sweet smile upon her lips, always returned to her; and she knew then that the sting which had poisoned all her life had ceased its smarting, that all pain was over, and her rest was at hand.

After tea they all went out upon the veranda, which overlooked a charming spot, half garden, half lawn.

Brownie, after seeing Miss Douglas in a comfortable arm-chair, with a hassock at her feet, threw herself into the hammock, and swung lazily back and forth, while the more stately Aspasia gracefully arranged herself and her lengthy skirts upon a rustic seat near Miss Mehetabel.

A half hour passed in pleasant conversation, when Brownie, chancing to glance at her aunt, saw that she had grown very pale again, and her lips had a bluish tinge, which she had never seen upon them before.

She got out of the hammock, and coming up behind her, bent down, until her bright cheek rested against the aged one.

"Auntie," she said, "it is getting chilly and damp out here; let us go in."

"Very well, dear;" and rising, she allowed her to lead her into the house.

"Shall we go into the drawing-room, or up into your boudoir?" Brownie asked, lingering in the hall.

"Come up into my room; it is more cozy there," she answered.

Up the grand staircase they went, and a chill of fear settled upon the heart of that young girl, as she noted how slowly Miss Douglas moved, and how heavily she leaned upon her arm. Something very unusual for the self-reliant Miss Mehetabel.

After she was comfortably seated again, Brownie brought her a glass of wine.

"Drink this, auntie," she said.

"What is the matter with you, darling?" questioned Miss Mehetabel, looking up into the anxious face above her.

"You do not look quite well, auntie, and I am afraid you have taken cold."

"No, I think not; I feel perfectly well, and almost young again, to have two such bright, lively girls about me. But I will drink the wine to please you, it will only serve to make me more merry." And she swallowed the rich old port, with a fond glance and smile at the lovely girl. "What a blessing you are to me, darling! You have been my sunbeam all your life. Remember that always, will you, dear?" she added, as she handed the glass back to her.

Brownie for answer stooped and kissed her, yet her heart ached strangely at the fond words; they seemed like the farewell of some one about to die.

Ah, if she could have known that coming events were but casting their shadows before!

Another half-hour passed, and Miss Douglas said she would retire, and they might go down into the drawing-room and amuse themselves.

At this moment the hall-bell rang, and soon after the footman brought up two cards upon a salver.

"Anna Gordon and her brother," Brownie said, after reading the names upon them.

"Well, dear, go right down, and send up Martha to attend to me," commanded Miss Douglas.

"No, auntie; I want the pleasure of putting you to bed myself to-night. Aspasia is well acquainted with them—let her go down, and I will come when I have tucked you up."

In vain Miss Mehetabel protested, but Brownie was playfully willful, and refused to go for Martha; and so Miss Huntington

finally departed to entertain the visitors, wondering inwardly at her friend's devotion to "that old maid."

With tender, loving hands, the young girl assisted her to disrobe, brought forth the snowy *robe de nuit*, with its delicate lace at the neck and wrists, and the dainty cap, which she insisted must be tied in the pretty bow, even if she *was* going to bed and there was no one to see it. She shook up the soft pillow to make it lighter still, and smoothed the wrinkles out of the counterpane, and then drew a little stand with a glass of water and a tiny silver bell upon it, so that she need not get up if she wanted anything.

She then turned down the gas just as she knew she liked it, and flitted hither and thither putting away the clothes she had just taken off, and arranging them conveniently for morning. She lingered tenderly over them, just as if she was impressed she should never do it again.

Finally all was done to her mind, and she turned again toward the bed to get her good-night kiss.

Miss Mehetabel lay very quiet, with her eyes closed, a smile upon her lips, and, in the dim light, with her snowy surroundings, she looked like some beautiful saint in repose.

"Auntie must have been tired indeed, if she could fall asleep so soon," said Brownie to herself, as she drew near.

"Auntie, good-night. If you are comfortable now, I will go down," she said, softly, disliking to disturb her, and yet not wishing to go without her customary caress.

She bent over and touched her lips to the placid forehead.

Still the old lady did not move.

Brownie started, and looked more closely. What did this solemn silence mean?

"Auntie, I am going now. Kiss me, please," Brownie said, aloud, a note of fear in her voice, and her rosy lips met those smiling, motionless ones.

With a smothered cry of terror, the fair girl started back.

They had given back no answering caress—they were rigid as marble!

The eyelids rested upon the pale cheeks, the silvery hair lay smooth upon the waxen brow, the delicate hands were clasped peacefully upon her motionless bosom, and she seemed like one who had only fallen into a deep sleep, but—she was dead!

In a moment she had passed, without pain or knowledge, from life's sorrow and weariness into the great unknown future; the gate of Paradise, which had seemed to Brownie at the tea-table to have swung apart just enough to let a *little* of Heaven's glory down upon her, had now opened wide, and she had passed through its portals into the *full* glory of the celestial city, and the great burden which for forty-five years had crushed her kind and loving heart was rolled away at last.

Brownie, after that one smothered cry, stood for a moment motionless as Miss Douglas herself.

She did not scream or faint.

A terrible weight of pain clutched at her heart as the fearful conviction of the truth flashed upon her when she touched those rigid lips, and a great and solemn awe stole over her. But her dear one had stepped from earth to Heaven so quietly, so peacefully, and she seemed so beautiful lying there in her spotless night robes, with her clasped hands and lingering smile,

there was no terror about it, and Brownie would no more have disturbed that holy stillness than she would have disturbed the house of God.

With swift, noiseless steps, but ashen cheek, she glided from the room to call assistance, but met Martha just coming in.

"Martha, go and tell Mrs. Grimwood to come here at once, and then send James for Dr. Sargeant. Do not lose a moment," she said, in low tones, but with white, shaking lips.

"What is it, Miss Brownie?" asked the servant, anxiously.

"I don't know *really*, Martha, but go—*go!*"

Then, with no sense of fear, she turned back into that chamber of death, and stood silently by the dear "aunt-mother," who had for so long filled the places of both father and mother to her.

She knew now she was dead; she knew Dr. Sargeant, or any one else, could do nothing for her; they could not piece again the broken golden thread of life, nor give back to her the tender care and love which the good Father had seen fit to take from her. And a sense of her great loneliness was beginning to creep over her.

The housekeeper now came quickly in, alarmed by the message which Martha had taken to her.

Brownie turned and met her, but she was so calm and collected that the woman was half reassured.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Meta?" she asked, with an anxious glance at the still figure in the bed.

"Do not be alarmed, Mrs. Grimwood, and do not let there be any confusion, but I am afraid auntie has gone home."

The woman had strong nerves, and had looked upon death

many times, but she regarded the quiet girl as she made this startling statement with utter amazement. Then, in an instant, she was beside Miss Douglas' couch.

One glance was sufficient; she knew that the old lady had indeed gone home.

"Miss Meta," she said, sadly, and turning to her, "it is true, and I have been looking for it in just this way for a long time. But to think *you* should have been here all alone with her—you, so young, and having never looked on death before!" and overcome with sympathy for the lonely girl, she gathered her close in her arms, and began to cry softly over her.

A hard, dry sob came shudderingly up from Brownie's aching heart.

"She was my father and mother both, and I loved her so," she said, but no tears fell from her burning eyes.

The shock had benumbed her into this false calm, and she seemed to have no power to weep.

"Come away, dear, this is no place for you," said Mrs. Grimwood, gently trying to force her from the spot.

"Oh, no, I cannot go away and leave her. Dr. Sargeant will be here presently, and I wish to see him. Does she not look lovely, Mrs. Grimwood?" and she touched the silvery hair with the tips of her rosy fingers.

The woman did not reply, except by a look of wonder, and at that moment the doctor came bustling in, while the servants began to gather about the door, having learned from Martha that something was wrong.

Dr. Sargeant, as a matter of form, went up to the bed, felt for the pulse, and placed his hand above the motionless heart,

but his quick eye had told him all the moment he entered the room. He, too, had long expected it.

Yes, she was dead, he said, but she had died without a pang, from disease of the heart.

"She only went to sleep just as usual, Miss Brownie, and awoke in Heaven," he said, gently, with his kind eyes fixed upon the girl's pale, solemn face; and she heard the words with a sense of comfort which surprised even herself.

"I am so glad," she answered, simply, and in such a touching, self-forgetful way, that it almost made the strong man weep for her.

"Glad!" he repeated, laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Yes; you say it came upon her like a peaceful sleep, instead of the usual way, if so, it was for her the *blessedness* of *death*, after the *bitterness* of *life*. I am glad for her, but I shall be so lonely. Oh, auntie!"

It came to her now in all its cruel force, and she had no strength to resist when the good doctor half carried her from the room, and laid her upon her own bed, crushed and heart-broken.

CHAPTER VI.

STAKED AND LOST.

How the next few days passed Brownie never knew.

She had a dim idea of having had interviews with the undertaker, the clergyman, the florist, and others, pertaining to the last sad ceremonies for the dead.

She had submitted to the dressmaker to have her mourning made, and had answered innumerable questions from Mrs. Grimwood and the servants; but it all seemed like a dream—a horrible nightmare, which, holding her in its clutch, made the earth to seem desolate, the sun to give no light, the flowers to lose their brightness and fragrance, and her hitherto happy existence appear almost a blank.

One thing she remembered doing with her own little hands, and had experienced a sad pleasure in the simple service.

In ordering the rare and costly flowers which were to decorate the house, she had included a quantity of heliotrope and tuberoses—the flowers which Miss Mehetabel had always loved best on account of their purity and fragrance.

These she wove into a lovely star, and laid it upon the elegant casket above the pulseless breast, and then placed a few of the fairest and sweetest in the white clasped hands, which would

never rest with their fond and gentle touch upon her head again.

It was all over at last.

There were no near relatives, only some distant cousins, and these, knowing they had no claim upon the old lady's money, did not deem it worth their while to come to the funeral. So Brownie and Aspasia, who had proved herself a real comfort in these days of trial, sat alone, excepting the servants and a few intimate acquaintances, in those great somber rooms, while those last sad words were spoken above the dead.

And then they carried her forth to her last long home, and laid her beside those other dear ones, who had been gone so many years.

It seemed to Brownie as if she were almost the only one living—as if all the world had died and were buried, when she returned to that great house in all its lonely splendor.

"Oh, Aspasia," she cried, throwing herself into Miss Huntington's arms, with her first wild burst of tears, "what shall I do? I have nobody in the world now to love me."

"Don't talk so, darling," she said, her own tears flowing in sympathy. "I love you better than any one else in the world, and I will never forsake you."

She little knew how soon her words would be put to the test.

"I know you love me, dear, but you cannot stay with me; you will soon go home, where you have a fond father and mother, brothers and sisters, while I have no one. I have no object in life, Aspasia, now that auntie is gone," and again the torrent of grief rushed forth.

Miss Huntington made her lie down, and soothed her as she would a child. With her own dainty hands she removed her boots, brought a soft pair of slippers and put them on, then bathed her head, and worked over her until she grew calm again.

She proposed taking her back with her to Belmont Park, the name of her father's estate, telling her she should stay just as long as she liked, and that she would never get lonely there.

Their conversation was at length interrupted by a servant coming to tell them that Miss Douglas' presence was required in the library to listen to the reading of the will.

The summons made the poor girl's grief burst forth afresh.

"Oh, auntie, auntie!" she sobbed, "your money will be nothing to me without you—gold without love is worthless."

Poor Brownie! she did not know what was coming upon her.

"You will go down with me, Aspasia," she said, holding out her hand to her friend as she arose to obey the request.

"Certainly, dear, if you wish," was the kind reply, and the two friends descended to the library, to find Miss Mehetabel's lawyer, the family doctor, and clergyman awaiting their appearance.

Brownie greeted them with a graceful inclination of her head, then seated herself to await their business.

Reverend Mr. Ashley approached and took her hand.

"My dear Miss Douglas," he said, and his voice shook with sympathy as he looked into her sad face, "it was your aunt's request that her will be read immediately after the funeral ceremonies, and as our good friend, the doctor, and myself were

witnesses to that document, as were invited to be present at the reading of it."

Brownie bowed. She could not speak, for the tears were choking her so.

What was wealth to her in her lonely condition.

She knew everything was willed to her, for Miss Mehetabel had told her so, but her generous little heart recoiled from having so much, when there was no one but herself on whom to lavish it.

Mr. Ashley retired to a seat, and signified to Mr. Conrad, the lawyer, that they were ready to listen.

He took up the legal-looking document from the table, near which he was sitting, and began to read.

Everything, as she had expected, was given to Brownie, excepting a legacy of five hundred dollars to each of the trusty servants, who had been with her so many years.

All the plate, the house, with its elegant furnishings, the stables, with its fine horses and carriages, were hers, and she privileged to choose whom she liked to manage her affairs in the future.

There was a long silence after the lawyer ceased reading.

Brownie sat listless, and gazing absently out of the window, and feeling so strange and lonely, as if some great burden had suddenly fallen upon her.

"Ahem! ah—Miss Douglas—will you kindly give me your attention for a few moments?" asked Mr. Conrad, breaking in upon her reverie, and speaking with great embarrassment.

She started violently.

"Yes, sir; I beg your pardon for seeming inattentive," she said, and the color leaped into her face for a moment.

She waited a few moments, but he seemed suddenly to have become as absent-minded as she had been.

She glanced up at him, and was amazed at his appearance, while the doctor and Mr. Ashley exchanged wondering glances.

Mr. Conrad was an elderly man of about sixty; his hair was gray, and his face was wrinkled, but it was a noble face withal.

At this moment it seemed to be convulsed with pain.

His lips were drawn into a tight line across his teeth, and were almost livid, while the cords stood out hard and knotted upon his forehead, and the hand which held the will trembled visibly.

Brownie forgot herself instantly when she saw his evident suffering.

"Mr. Conrad, are you ill? Let me call James to get you something," she exclaimed, half rising to ring the bell.

"No, Miss Douglas, keep your seat. My illness is of the mind, not of the body," he replied, in tones of deepest pain.

Then, quickly rising, he went over and stood before her, with bowed head, and hands clenched, as if he were struggling with some terrible emotion.

"Miss Brownie," he continued, speaking very gently and humbly, "I have a very humiliating confession to make. I pray you, when you have heard it, to judge me as kindly as you can, and whatever you do with me to meet the claims of justice, if you will only say on your *own* part that you forgive an old man, it will take the heaviest burden of my life from my heart."

The young girl regarded him with wonder.

She could not understand what this proud, self-reliant man, who for many years had had charge of all her aunt's affairs, could mean by speaking in this humble, broken way to her.

The innocent, confiding look in her large, liquid eyes seemed to pierce him afresh.

"You wonder at my words," he went on, "and yet you look trustingly upon me; but it will not be quite so when I tell you that I have betrayed that trust."

"Betrayed my trust!" she repeated, not comprehending his words.

"Yes, betrayed your trust, betrayed your aunt's trust, and played the villain of the deepest dye. Miss Douglas, *I have made a beggar of you!*"

Had a ball of lightning exploded in their midst there could not have been greater consternation than three of the number present expressed.

Mr. Conrad had intimated to the doctor and clergyman that he had an unpleasant disclosure to make, but they had not been prepared for anything quite so astounding as this.

"Conrad, man, are you mad?" exclaimed Dr. Sargeant.

"Surely, my friend, you do not mean anything so bad as you have stated," said the kind-hearted clergyman, in grave tones.

"A beggar!" cried Miss Huntington, she alone taking in the full sense of the word, and appalled at her friend's calamity.

And now came the grand struggle between that young lady's aristocratic notions and her genuine love for Brownie.

Which would conquer?

But Brownie herself sat very quiet, with her little hands clasped idly in her lap.

She had heard his words, and she knew what they meant—the loss of home, friends, and all the comforts to which she had been accustomed ever since she could remember; yet what did it amount to, compared with the loss of her only loved one?

"Did you understand me, Miss Douglas?" asked Mr. Conrad, somewhat impatiently, and wondering at her apathy, while he did not heed the questions of the others.

"Yes; you said I—I should not have any property," she replied, avoiding the harsh words he had used.

"Good God! how indifferent you are; I said I had made you a *beggar*. Not a pauper in the streets has less than you will have when the debts are all paid," he cried, sinking into a chair by her side, the sweat rolling off his face.

"Yes, yes, I know what you mean," Brownie said, arousing herself when she saw how distressed he appeared, then added: "But please, Mr. Conrad, do not look so—do not feel so badly about it. I know auntie trusted you fully, and I am sure it was something you could not help; I dare say I shall not mind it so very much when I get used to it," she concluded, gently.

The stricken lawyer groaned aloud. He had been prepared for tears, and sobs, and censure; and here the noble girl was forgetting all her own wrong, and striving to comfort him for his share in it. It made him writhe in torture. Brownie's tender heart could not see him suffer thus without deep sympathy.

She forgot all about her own sorrow. She had known and

respected the old gentleman from her earliest remembrance. He had always noticed her as a child, and ever had a kind word to give her when he came upon business to her aunt, and she had grown to feel toward him as if he were almost one of the family. She now arose, and gliding to his side, laid her little hand upon his shoulder.

"Dear Mr. Conrad, will you please explain this disagreeable affair to me? I see it is troubling you very much. I do not understand much about business, but I will listen attentively, and try to comprehend."

"God bless you, dear child, for your goodness to me," he said, taking her hand in one of his, while he wiped his moist brow with the other. "I do not deserve it from you. Yes, I will explain at once, and have this dreadful burden off my mind; it has nearly crushed me for years. You know, dear, that I have had the care of your aunt's property for the last forty years—in fact, nearly ever since she came to this city to live."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, for thirty years I was faithful to my trust—I would no more have touched a penny of her money to appropriate it unlawfully than I would have cut my right hand off. Had any one told me then that *to-day I should be a thief*, I would have felled him to the ground and spurned him with my foot. But we cannot tell what we will do under certain temptations. Ten years ago a dear friend of mine died, leaving his only child in my care, together with a property of fifty thousand dollars. I invested it in what I believed to be a sound concern, but in less than a year it failed, and my friend's child was penniless."

"How sorry I am," was Brownie's simple comment, and deeply interested in the lawyer's tale.

He smiled bitterly, but clasping her hand more firmly, went on:

"I then did something which was not right, but which I thought must succeed, and everything would be all right again. I felt that I was entirely to blame for the loss of my ward's property, and that I was in duty bound to replace it. I had no ready funds of my own, but I knew that your aunt, with her vast wealth, would not miss fifty thousand dollars for a little while, and I resolved to use it—speculate in what promised to be a very successful operation, hoping thus to win back a portion at least of what I had lost for my ward. I staked it and *lost!*"

"Ah!" ejaculated the clergyman, with a sorrowful shake of the head.

"Whew!" whistled the doctor.

"Horrid man!" breathed Miss Huntington, under her breath.

But Brownie only nestled a step nearer the poor man's side.

"Driven desperate by this unfortunate circumstance," he went on, with a deep sigh, "I grew reckless, and invested a hundred thousand more of Miss Douglas' money, but again I lost. Then a bank where I had invested a very large amount of her funds suddenly suspended payment; but hoping that all would come out right by and by, I kept all knowledge of the difficulty from her. You know that the old lady loved the good things of this life, and was not at all careful of the dollars; and she need not have been, had I been faithful. But I

continued to speculate with what ready money I could get hold of, and, with her annual expenditure, her thousands have melted into hundreds; and to-day, when she thought you would inherit at least a million, I have to tell you, that if I pay the debts and the legacies to the servants, there will not remain sufficient to feed you for a year. Yes, Miss Douglas, in the worst sense of the word, I have made you a beggar. I, who always prided myself upon my integrity and my incorruptibility, have forfeited my character for probity and honesty, and stand here before you a criminal worthy to suffer the extent of the law."

He paused for a moment, but as no one spoke, he continued:

"This is my confession; and now I surrender myself into your hands, to do with me as you will. I do not offer any excuse for my fault—it was wrong from beginning to end. I had no right whatever to touch a penny of your aunt's money. I was deeply distressed at the loss of my ward's property, but I ought to have stopped there. However, having once failed of success in using Miss Douglas' money, I kept on, hoping, in my desperation, that some favorable turn in fortune's wheel would enable me to replace everything."

There was an awkward silence when the old man concluded.

Dr. Sargeant and Mr. Ashley were horror-struck at the revelation.

It had been deeply humiliating to the old and respected lawyer to make this confession in the presence of these witnesses, but the time had come wher the state of affairs could no longer be concealed. The property was all gone, and Miss Doug-

las' death necessitated a settlement of some kind, and it would have to come out that her niece and reputed heiress was penniless. The house and everything would have to be sold to pay the outstanding debts, and she who had been cradled in the lap of luxury from her earliest infancy, must now go forth into the cold world, to buffet with its storms and bitterness alone.

Brownie's face was very grave as he concluded, and all but the lawyer were watching her anxiously, to see how she would bear the news.

She had bent her whole mind to the recital, and comprehended all which must follow.

She knew what it meant to be poor, for she had seen many poor girls toiling for their daily bread, and her kind and gentle heart had prompted her to aid and comfort not a few on their toilsome way heretofore.

She began already to realize the care that had thus suddenly fallen upon her. She knew that henceforth she must work with her hands for the bread which she ate; and during the lawyer's story she had changed from the gay and light-hearted girl to the grave and thoughtful woman. But still her first thought was for others.

"I am so glad auntie did not know of this be—before she died," she said, her lips quivering as she uttered those last words.

Mr. Conrad looked up with an expression of bewilderment.

"It would have made her so unhappy, you know, on my account," Brownie explained.

The lawyer's head fell upon his breast again.

"What will you do with me?" he asked, wearily.

"What will I do with you, Mr. Conrad? I do not think I clearly understand what you mean," she answered, with a troubled expression on her sweet face.

"You know that the law takes care of people who do as I have done. The crime of embezzlement is no light one."

"Oh, dear Mr. Conrad, do not speak so! You meant to commit no crime; you only wished to right some one else's wrong. It was not, perhaps, just the right thing to do without auntie's knowledge, but I can do nothing with you, only——"

"Only?" the lawyer asked, raising his haggard face, and eagerly reading the lovely flushed one at his side.

"Only to be very, *very* sorry for you, my friend," she said, softly, and with a little quivering smile.

Mr. Conrad looked upon her as if she had been an angel—wonder, reverence, awe, all expressed upon his countenance. Then, with a deep groan, the strong man bowed his head and wept the bitterest tears he had ever shed in his life.

He could have borne to hear the felon's doom pronounced upon him with the face of a stole; but this sublime pity and forgiveness caused him to forget his manhood, and made a child of him.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE HAD CONQUERED PRIDE.

Dr. Sargeant now came forward, saying:

"Miss Douglas, do you realize how serious this matter is? Have you considered what your position will be in the world henceforth?"

He did not like to have the lawyer let off so easily.

"I realize, doctor, that I am no longer an heiress to great wealth, as every one has thus far supposed—that there is no longer a life of idleness and pleasure for me. On the contrary, I must go out into the world and work for my living," Brownie replied, lifting her grave eyes to the doctor's face, while there was a touch of dignity in her manner which he had never seen before.

He glanced compassionately at the little hand, with its pretty pink fingers, which hung among the folds of her dress, and sighed.

It seemed a hard lot for this delicate girl, who had never known aught of hardship, and whose every wish had thus far been gratified.

"Mr. Conrad," he continued, turning to the lawyer, "this is a very grave matter. How do your own affairs stand?"

"Much the same as Miss Douglas'. I have nothing in the

world except what I earn from day to day. If I had money of my own, do you suppose I would have touched any one else's?" he asked, a flash of indignation kindling his eyes, and his fine form for a moment becoming erect.

"Pardon me. No. But who is this ward of yours?"

"Miss Emily Elliot."

"Where is she now?"

"In my own family. She has never known of her loss; I have provided for her every need and want by the labor of my own hands. I never intend that she shall know of it while I live—if I am taken away it will have to come out.

"And, Miss Douglas," turning eagerly to Brownie, "if you do not utterly hate me for the trouble which I have brought upon you, will you, too, come to my home and let me provide the comforts of life for you? I can easily do that; I have no one but my wife and Miss Elliot, and my business will give me enough to support you all comfortably."

"It is well thought of, Mr. Conrad," said Mr. Ashley, approvingly.

He, also, could not bear the idea of that young girl working for her living or going out into the cold world uncared for.

"Oh, Mr. Ashley, and you, doctor, you can never know the suffering which this thing has brought upon me," Mr. Conrad continued, rising, and pacing the floor nervously. "I thought I was an honorable man—I *am* an honorable man at heart now, but my zeal to do well by my friend's child, my zeal that no one should suffer who had placed their interests in my keeping, has led me to commit a wrong for which I can never atone.

Had it not been that others were dependent upon me, my life would have paid the forfeit years ago."

The clergyman went up to him and took him by the hand.

"My friend, do not grieve thus despairingly over what you cannot now help. I am deeply pained at what you have told us, but my respect for your moral character is not diminished. It has been a mistake of the head, not of the heart; and I should not hesitate, if it were necessary or expedient, to place my own interests in your keeping to-day."

"God bless you!" returned Mr. Conrad, deeply affected.

"No, you feel your error too deeply ever to be guilty of the same again."

"If that bank only had not suspended payment, Miss Douglas might still have had a competence; but everything has seemed to be against me. But, Miss Brownie," he added, turning again to the sorrowful girl, "you have not yet answered my question. Will you come to me and let me take care of you?"

"No, dear friend; you have enough upon your mind and heart now, and I cannot add to your burdens."

"It will not. I pray you, give me the satisfaction of doing this much toward averting the consequences of my wrong," he pleaded, earnestly.

"My dear," interposed the clergyman, impressively, "I advise you, by all means, to accept Mr. Conrad's hospitality and protection. You are very young, and not at all fitted to do battle with the world. It will never do for you to try and support yourself; you are entirely ignorant of the ways of the world."

"Mr. Ashley, there are hundreds, yes, thousands, as young

and even more delicate than I, who not only support themselves, but assist in maintaining their father and mother, brothers and sisters," returned Brownie. "I do not claim to be of finer clay than my unfortunate sisters."

"But they have been brought up to it," interposed Mr. Conrad.

"Some of them have, and some have not. God has given me health; and, thanks to my aunt, who took infinite pains with me, I have an excellent education; and, gentlemen, I really feel competent to take care of myself," the young girl returned, proudly, yet with a more cheerful look than she had worn since Miss Mehetabel's death.

"But it would give Mr. Conrad infinite satisfaction, I know, to think he was saving you, in a measure, from the cruel consequences of his act," said Dr. Sargeant.

"I appreciate Mr. Conrad's kindness, and am truly grateful to him, but I should do violence to my own feelings if I allowed myself to be dependent upon any one's bounty while I have health and strength," and her delicate face flushed to her very brow as she said it.

In vain they pleaded and urged, both the clergyman and the doctor offering her a home with them, if she would not go with Mr. Conrad. She remained firm, and they were filled with admiration at the strength of character which she displayed.

"I will try for a while," she said, seeing how bitterly disappointed Mr. Conrad was; "and if I fail, I shall know where to come for a home."

"You are not strong, you will break down under it," he said, gloomily.

"I think not," was the cheerful response. "I have always sympathized with these poor girls, and now I shall know, by actual experience, what their life is. I feel, dear friends, that this is a lesson in life, through which God intends to teach me, and work out for me some great good."

"What will you do?" the lawyer asked, while great tears rolled down his wrinkled cheeks.

"I do not know yet; I shall have to consider that point a while."

Then, after a few minute's thought, and pitying his distress, she added:

"At all events, whatever I undertake, *if I fail*, I promise you I will not refuse the home you offer me; and if I need a friend I shall always know where to find him."

She held out her hand to him with a sweet, winning smile, and again the strong man broke down, weeping like a child, and there was not a dry eye in the room excepting her own.

"What a foolish set we are!" exclaimed the doctor, after a vigorous blowing of the nose. "This young lady shames us all. Succeed? Of course she'll succeed, and I say God bless her—she is an honor to the name which she bears."

Brownie felt prouder at the good doctor's compliment, than she had ever felt in her life before.

"I *will* be an honor to the name," she thought to herself, and her eye grew brighter, and her form more proudly erect with the resolve.

After a few more casual remarks the gentlemen took their departure, and the two girls were once more alone.

"Brownie Douglas, you surely did not mean what you told

Mr. Conrad!" exclaimed Aspasia Huntington, the moment the door closed after them.

"I told him quite a number of things; to what in particular do you refer?"

"Why, working for your own living, to be sure."

"Certainly, I meant it; there remains nothing else for me to do."

"But Mr. Conrad offered to relieve you from all anxiety about your future. Why did you not accept his offer?"

"What! and degrade myself by becoming dependent on his bounty, when he already has more than his heart and hands full? Never!" exclaimed the young girl, indignantly, her cheeks flushing a vivid crimson.

"I'm sure it is no more than your right, after his wronging you out of your fortune as he has," returned Aspasia, with a pout.

"The poor man meant me no wrong, and would replace every penny of it to-day, if he could do so by forfeiting everything he holds dear in life, and I bear him no ill-will. But while I have nothing legally my own, and have health and ability, I will never be dependent upon any one but myself," Brownie said, haughtily.

"But you will lose caste."

"Perhaps; but I shall not lose my character nor my self-respect," was the very quiet though cold reply.

"Your friends will forsake you."

"They are not worthy the name, then, nor a regret," and the delicate red lips curled with infinite scorn, yet there was

the faintest perceptible quiver upon them, and a wistful look in the dark, beautiful eyes.

Would Aspasia go with the rest?

"Do you not care if you lose them?" Aspasia asked, eagerly.

"I have had many kind and dear ones, but if they have loved my prospective *fortune* more than they have loved *me*, the sooner I find it out the better. At all events, this calamity, if it can be so termed, will show me the true and the false."

"And you will not feel degraded to go out and earn your pittance, perhaps a dollar a day, with your own hands?"

"No. My hands may grow hard and rough with the toil, but my heart will be the same. It cannot take from me my dignity, nor harm my intellect. How, then, will it degrade me, Aspasia?"

"There are those who will consider it a degradation," returned Miss Huntington, evasively. "How will it move you to find that those who have always courted your favor will shun you in the future?"

A smile of contempt swept over Miss Douglas' beautiful face.

"I should be more grieved over their shallow folly than for my own misfortune," she said, in a voice of scorn.

"Brownie Douglas, you are a splendid girl, and I love you a thousand times more at this moment than I ever did in my life before. I am prouder of you as a friend, prouder of you without a penny to-day, than I was yesterday when I thought you worth a million!" exclaimed Miss Huntington, impulsively, as she threw her arms around her friend and embraced her fervently.

This broke Brownie down completely, and she sobbed wildly for a few minutes.

"Dear Asia," she said, at length, wiping her tears, "I thought surely, when you were talking about caste and the degredation of toil, that you were speaking your own thoughts. We have loved each other so well, that the idea of losing your friendship was very painful to me."

"Forgive me if I for the moment pained you. I have read of people being above such feelings upon the loss of all their earthly goods, but I never believed it, and I was testing you. I truly prize you more in your misfortune than I ever did before. You have taught me a lesson to-day which I shall not soon forget. Your example toward the poor and unfortunate has always troubled my conscience, and henceforth I shall shorten my trains and extend my charities."

"I am glad to hear you say this, Asia, for you have the means at your command to do great good," replied Brownie, her face now radiant at this proof of true friendship.

Love had conquered pride!

"Well, but I'm afraid the lesson will not be lasting if you do not follow it up with others, and so, my darling, I am going to propose that you go home to stay with me. No, you needn't refuse," she continued, putting her hand playfully over Brownie's lips, "on the score of being dependent, for you know papa has plenty, and would never feel it in the world. He would be delighted, for he has always admired you intensely."

"Aspasia, I know it will hurt you deeply to have me refuse this kindness, but indeed it cannot be, dear. My mind has been made up from the first to earn my bread 'by the sweat of

my brow,' and *nothing* can change it," Brownie answered, decidedly.

"Will you not come if papa insists upon it?"

"No, dear."

"But if he desires you to come as a companion and a help to me?" urged Aspasia, earnestly.

Brownie laughed aloud at the idea, in spite of her sadness.

"A companion, Aspasia, when your home is already full!"

"Well, but you know Jennie is soon to be married, and Lina needs some one to look after her French and music. You would be just the one, and we would have such delightful times together."

"It would be all a mere form. I know I should not be received or treated as a governess or companion in your father's house, and I should live a life of idleness and pleasure as much as heretofore. No; I have said I will work, and *work I will!* and if all my friends prove themselves as true as you have, I shall only be so much the happier," was the firm reply.

Miss Huntington knew it would be useless to say more, and there the matter rested for the present.

CHAPTER VIII.

EARNING HER OWN LIVING.

It soon became noised abroad that Miss Meta Douglas, the heiress, was no more than any other common mortal, since her wealth had taken to itself wings and flown away.

She had been obliged to descend from the golden pedestal on which she had been elevated for so long, and was, therefore, treated accordingly. But with the "spirit of heroes" strong within her, she took no notice of it, other than to curl her pretty lips with scorn, and then went on the even tenor of her way.

Her greatest trial was that the dear old home, with all its precious furnishings, around which so many tender associations clustered, must go under the auctioneer's hammer.

It seemed as if her heart must break, when, as the last day before the sale came, she went from room to room to take a farewell view of everything, and gather up the few precious treasures which Mr. Conrad had told her she was at liberty to take.

Aspasia had proved herself a friend indeed during her friend's trial.

She had insisted upon remaining with her until everything was over, and donning a simple calico dress, minus either ruffle or train, she superintended with her own fair hands the packing

of valuable books, statuettes, bronzes, and ornaments, which she knew were so dear to Brownie's tender heart.

And when, at length, the last day arrived, early in the morning, before even the servants were astir, she had slipped down stairs, and, moving noiselessly from room to room, had tacked a card bearing the words "sold" upon several of the finest paintings, which she knew Miss Mehetabel had highly prized, from the fact of their having been brought over from the old country.

Her father had given her permission and *carte blanche* to perform this delicate service for her friend.

But it was all over at last.

Everything was sold, and the house was left bare and desolate.

Aspasia had gone, and Brownie was alone.

The debts were all paid, also the bequests to the servants, which Brownie had insisted upon, although strongly urged to invest the money for herself.

"No," she said, decidedly; "auntie wished them to have it—they have been very faithful, and I desire her wishes to be strictly adhered to."

Accordingly, Mr. Conrad was obliged to do her bidding, and then, with a sigh of despair, placed two hundred dollars, all that remained of a fortune of a million, in her little hands.

"Why, I feel quite rich!" she exclaimed, merrily, as, after counting it over, she looked up and saw his quivering lip.

With a mighty effort he swallowed the sobs which nearly broke forth, and managed to say:

"Now, dear child, you will come home with me for a while. Mrs. Conrad desires it, and Emily is lonely."

"Thank you, dear Mr. Conrad, I cannot, as I have promised to be in New York to-morrow morning," she answered, with an air of business which would have amused him had not his heart been so full.

"In New York to-morrow morning!" he ejaculated, in astonishment.

"Yes, I have an engagement there."

"An engagement? May I ask of what nature?" and he felt hurt that she had not consulted him regarding her movements for the future.

"Certainly. I saw an advertisement a week ago for one hundred girls to work on fancy straws. I have always been bewitched over fancy straw work, so I wrote, asking for a situation."

"My child, why did you not consult with me?"

"Because, my friend, I know that you are already nearly distracted, and I was resolved to begin to depend upon myself at once. Yesterday I received a letter, telling me to come on immediately, and I telegraphed that I would arrive to-morrow morning."

"But you have no friends there, and where will you make it your home?" he asked, in dismay, yet admiring the resolution expressed in her bright eye and flushed face.

"There is a boarding-house connected with the establishment for the accommodation of those who work in the factory, and I shall board there for the present."

She spoke hurriedly; the prospect was not a pleasant one, even to her sanguine heart.

"Miss Douglas, this is the height of folly. *You* working in

a straw factory, and boarding in a third-class boarding-house! What do you suppose your aunt would say?" asked the lawyer, in despair.

"Mr. Conrad, I do not believe it would be *very* wrong in me to say that I am very glad auntie is *not* here to know anything about it. There was a good deal of sorrow in her life, and it is a relief to me that she went home before this thing came upon us," Brownie answered, solemnly, yet with lips that quivered painfully. "But," she added, after a moment's fighting with herself for self-control, "I am young and strong, and I can bear this, since it is sent upon me. However, we will not talk any more about it, please, since my mind is made up. I will write you, and let you know of my safe arrival, and I shall be happy to hear from you occasionally, if you can spare the time. It would seem as if I had some one in the world to care for me a little; and, Mr. Conrad, it *is* just a *little* hard to break away so suddenly from the old life and the old friends."

A little hard!

Did he not know it? Did he not feel it? He was heart-sick. His whole soul rebelled against the cruel fate which willed it so, and against his own rash wickedness which had brought her to it. And then to see how she clung to him as to almost the only friend she had!—it touched him to the core.

"Write to you, child? Indeed I will, and anything else in the world that you will let me do for you. And, Miss Douglas, I shall strain every effort in your behalf, and just as fast as I can accumulate anything I shall invest it in some safe place to your account. Once more—can you forgive me for bringing you to this?" he sobbed, wringing her hand.

"Surely I can, my friend, and let us try to feel that a higher power than that of earth ordained this," she answered, sweetly. "Let us feel that there is a lesson in this trial for us both."

He bade her farewell as she took her seat in the train that was to bear her away, feeling worse than any condemned criminal who had been sentenced to hard labor for life. It nearly drove him wild that she would not let him care for her—that she must go forth unprotected into the world to earn the bread she ate, and he was utterly powerless to prevent it.

* * * * * * *

Never was there a more lonely or heart-sick girl than Brownie Douglas when she entered the office of Ware & Coolidge the next morning, and presented her card, and the letter she had received from them engaging her to come into their employ.

She had arrived in New York late the night previous, and taken a room at a hotel where she had once stopped with Miss Douglas; but the loneliness of her situation had driven sleep from her eyes, and this in itself had not prepared her to encounter the cold stare of strangers.

"Do you wish to see any one, miss?" asked a clerk, as she entered the office, and bestowing a bold stare of admiration upon her lovely face.

"I wish to see Mr. Coolidge, if you please," Brownie answered, with cold dignity, yet a hot flush arose to her cheek at his look and manner.

"Ah, yes, certainly. Walk this way," and the dandy led her into an inner office, where a man of about forty-five sat reading his paper.

"Mr. Coolidge, a young lady to see you, sir," the young man said, and, with another insolent stare, bowed himself out.

The gentleman immediately came forward, and Brownie gave him her card and the letter.

"Ah, yes, Miss Meta Douglas," he said, pleasantly, reading the name, while his quick eye ran over her dainty figure from head to foot, taking in her beauty and expensive apparel at a glance. "You understand the business, I suppose. What department would you prefer to work in?"

"No, sir, I know nothing whatever about the business; I have come to learn," she answered, frankly and simply.

The gentleman gave her a look of surprise, then a smile of amusement curled his lips.

He was quick to see that she knew nothing of the rough ways of the world—that she had been born and bred to better things. Her quiet, dignified, yet graceful manner, her rich dress, her whole appearance, bespoke the refined and polished lady, and he comprehended her situation at once.

"My dear young lady," he said, a trifle embarrassed, "there is some mistake about this. We *never* employ any but experienced hands. The fall work is coming on rapidly, and we need those who can go right into it without any showing or teaching. Did not the advertisement say 'none but experienced hands need apply?'"

"Yes, sir," Brownie replied, with a sinking heart; "but I thought it might be only a mere form; and as I am very quick to learn anything, and necessity has suddenly compelled me to labor for my living, I thought I would apply for the easiest work I could find."

"Do you think straw-sewing easy work?" Mr. Coolidge asked, with a genial smile, and deeply interested in the fair stranger.

"I always thought it very pretty work, and judged it easy," she answered, naively.

"Have you relatives living in New York?" Mr. Coolidge asked, thoughtfully.

"I have *no* relatives, excepting very distant ones," and the sad tones touched him.

"Excuse me for asking the question," he added, courteously, "but I feared if you remained with us, the accommodations in the boarding-house might not be pleasant for *you*, and I hoped you had some other place to which to go."

Too well he knew of the meager fare, the close, hot rooms, and hard beds which were provided for the factory help.

"Thank you," Brownie answered, quietly, "but if you kindly consent to my staying, the boarding-house will do well for me as for the others whom you employ."

He regarded her keenly for a moment, hardly knowing whether she intended any reflections upon the firm regarding the accommodations which they had provided for their help, or whether she was indifferent concerning the matter. But she stood there so quiet and lady-like, so unconscious that her words had been a sharp reproof, that he was reassured.

He knew from her appearance that she had never labored a day in her life. He knew, also, that nothing but the sternest necessity could have driven one like her to manual toil, and his really kind heart was interested, and he resolved to see what he could do for her.

"Miss Douglas, I think I will give you a trial and see what you can do, although it is not our custom to employ green hands. If you will allow me to be the judge of what you will learn the most readily, I will show you to that department at once."

"Certainly, and thank you."

The brown eyes brightened, the sad, tired face brightened up into new beauty. He saw it, and was glad he had broken over the rules for her sake.

"Come this way, then."

He opened a door opposite the one by which she had entered the office, and led her into a long room where a hundred girls sat at tables, their hands flying back and forth upon the hats and bonnets, as if their very existence depended upon the number of stitches which they could set in a minute; as it did, poor things!

"This is the wiring room," explained Mr. Coolidge, "and I think you could learn to do this work more easily than any other; you are not strong enough to run a machine, and your fingers are too tender to finish off the tips," and he glanced at the delicate hands from which she had drawn her gloves.

"Machines! Are hats and bonnets made by machinery?" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes," and he smiled at her ignorance, then asked: "Do you think you would like to work here?"

Surely here was a new departure.

Whoever knew of the proud and aristocratic W. W. Coolidge asking an applicant if she would *like* to work here or there be-

fore? It was usually "give her machine No. 43," or "send her up to the finishing room," or "put her to wiring."

But the gentleman recognized his equal in Miss Douglas, and involuntarily treated her accordingly.

"Yes," Brownie answered, "and I think I can learn very readily."

Her quick eyes had been watching every movement of the girls near which they stood, and she felt as if she could almost wire a hat without any assistance. She was soon undeceived, however.

"I presume you do not care to begin to-day?" Mr. Coolidge remarked, after a few moments.

"Yes, sir, please, if it is convenient; I should like to learn immediately. I have no place to go, except to a hotel, and I should get very homesick to remain there all day," Brownie explained, nervously.

She preferred doing anything rather than remaining alone with her own sad thoughts. She tried to be brave, but there were hours when it seemed as if she could not bear her lot.

"Very well. Miss Walton, please come here a moment," Mr. Coolidge called to the overseer of the room.

She came at his bidding.

A tall, angular, sour-visaged woman, who had been in the establishment for years, and her face grew darker yet when her eyes fell upon the delicate beauty of the young girl standing by her employer's side.

She had always hated everything that was bright or beautiful, probably because it made her own deficiency in that respect so apparent.

"Miss Walton," continued Mr. Coolidge, "this is Miss Douglas, and I wish you to assign her a pleasant seat in the hall, and teach her to wire *hats*."

"*Teach* her! I thought no inexperienced hands were wanted here?" exclaimed the woman, measuring the young girl with her keen eyes, and speaking in an impatient tone.

"That was what I said, Miss Walton. I desire you to *teach* her to wire *hats*. Please give her some work right away."

Mr. Coolidge spoke in a quiet, authoritative way, which there was no gainsaying, and he had specified hats, because he knew they were much easier to do than bonnets.

Without replying to him, Miss Walton told Brownie to follow her, and, with a grateful smile and bow to her employer, she obeyed.

She was led to a seat in a quiet corner of the hall, where Miss Walton, sitting down beside her, took up a hat, and without speaking once during the operation, wired it with rapid fingers, Brownie watching intently meanwhile.

"Can you do it?" she asked, curtly, when she had finished.

"I can try," the young girl answered, with a little sigh, longing to ask a few questions, yet not possessing the courage to do so of the forbidding-looking personage at her side.

And now the wearisome, lonely task of earning her own living was begun.

Her heart ached with a sense of utter desolation as she sat there, vainly trying to imitate Miss Walton's example of wiring a hat.

She felt more utterly alone among those hundred girls than

she had done the night before in her quiet room at the hotel. She knew that many curious eyes were watching her every movement, and this of itself did not serve to make her work any easier. She knew she was very awkward, and she knew she must appear to great disadvantage before those experienced wirers, who had been in the service, doubtless, for many years.

The wire hurt her delicate fingers, the needle, instead of going to its appointed place, often slipped and pierced their rosy tips, and the crimson drops would ooze forth, causing her to lay aside her work and wrap the wounded members in her handkerchief until they ceased to bleed, lest they should stain the hat.

One sad-looking girl on her left, had, without appearing to do so, been watching her ineffectual efforts with a great deal of sympathy.

When at length, after running her needle half its length under her finger-nail, Brownie laid down her work in despair, she turned kindly toward her and said, with a smile:

"The work is new to you, isn't it?"

"Yes," Brownie replied, looking up at the sweet tones, and much comforted by them; "and I am afraid I shall never learn. I am so awkward."

"Oh, yes, you will. We were all so at the beginning."

"Were you? Then I'll try again," she said, brightening instantly.

It was a real comfort to her to know that she was not quite such a goose as she had thought herself, after all.

"Perhaps if I show you how to hold the hat, and just how

to set the needle, you would get on faster," said the strange girl, laying down her work, and holding out her own hand for Brownie's.

"Thank you. If you will, I shall be grateful. I watched Miss Walton carefully, but could not seem to get her way of holding it."

"Miss Walton does not like the trouble of teaching any one," returned the other, coldly.

"Now," she continued, "take the hat like this, between your finger and thumb, so; then with your finger try to steady the wire in its place. There, that is just right. Now put your needle through on the under side of the wire, slip the hat along, and take a long stitch; no—that is too short; you will never earn anything if you take such little stitches," concluded the girl, smiling again.

"But Miss Walton told me to be '*very particular*,'" said Brownie, surprised at the fearfully long stitch which she was told to take.

"I know; she tells us all to be 'very particular,' but when a few stitches will answer the purpose as well as a good many, we do not hesitate to avail ourselves of the fact."

"You are very kind to show me, and I think I shall do nicely now."

Brownie worked on more hopefully after this, and found that she could now make the refractory wire lay in its place, and knowing just how to hold the work, the needle no longer slipped into her fingers.

"I do not think you will have any more trouble, and every

one you do, you will find the next one will come easier," her companion said, after watching her a few moments, and giving her a little more advice.

It was even so. She was very quick in her motions, and apt to learn, and after a while she found she could wire a hat in ten minutes, when at first it had taken her more than double that time.

But the confinement—the close, hot room, the noise of distant machinery, and incessant chatter of the girls around her, began to wear upon her.

Her head throbbed and ached, as did also her arms and back, from their unaccustomed work, and she grew so tired and nervous that it seemed to her when night came as if her brain were turned.

Wearily and sorrowfully she wended her way back to the hotel where she had stopped the night before, and threw herself upon her bed, too thoroughly worn out to even heed the demands of hunger.

She lay there a long time weeping and sobbing, longing for one soft touch of the "vanished hand" upon her aching head, and the soothing sound of that "voice which was still."

She almost prayed in her loneliness that the good Father would remove her too from the weary cares of earth, as He had done her only friend.

But her strong spirit conquered at last, and, rising, she bathed her face and head, re-arranged her toilet, put on her hat again, and went down to the office to settle her bill at the hotel.

Notwithstanding her loneliness on the night of her arrival, after the noise and din of the day, she would gladly have remained in that quiet room, but she knew her purse would not permit of it; so, after paying the clerk, she ordered a carriage and proceeded to the factory boarding-house, which was to be her home for the present.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE.

The days passed slowly by, and Brownie became more and more accustomed to her work.

Before the week was out, she found, by diligent application, that she could earn seventy-five cents a day, and during the next week her earnings gradually crept up to a dollar a day.

She became quite hopeful after this, for her nature was naturally buoyant, and she was one who would not readily give up an undertaking, for the spirit of the Douglas was strong within her.

She began to feel very independent, too, and she really enjoyed the feeling that she was able to take care of herself.

To be sure, her earnings at the most were only six dollars a week. Three and a half of these were paid out for her board and lodging, and another dollar for washing, leaving her only a dollar and a half for other needs.

But she still had the two hundred dollars which she had received from Mr. Conrad, and her wardrobe was amply supplied for a year or two, so that she had no fears but that she could live, at least until some better position should be offered her. She hoped in time to find a situation as teacher.

Had it not been for that dreadful boarding-house, with its

noise, its small, close rooms, and its ill-cooked fare, she would have been comparatively content, for she had made the acquaintance of one or two young girls who were refined and intelligent like herself, and who, too, had been suddenly reduced from affluence to poverty.

But a change was about to come to Brownie, which was to influence her whole future.

This little episode of three weeks in a straw factory was but the stepping-stone to a year so fraught with changes and trial, that many times after she sighed for the noise and discomfort with the independence of those few days when she toiled so hard for her pittance, and she would gladly have returned to the quiet and seclusion of her close little room in the ill-appointed boarding-house.

Mattie Burnham was the name of the young girl who had been so kind to Brownie on that first day of her life in the factory, and soon, by her gentleness and refinement, won a warm place in her heart.

Both of the young girls were extremely fond of reading.

One evening they issued forth, arm in arm, and wended their way to a public library to exchange their books, and to look over the new periodicals in the reading-room connected with it.

They exchanged their books, and then proceeding to the reading-room, seated themselves in a cozy corner, and were soon deeply interested in the various reading matter which lay scattered about upon the tables.

They read for an hour or more, then Mattie, suddenly glancing up at the clock, asked :

"Meta, do you know what time it is?"

"No," absently.

"It is half-past eight."

"Is it?" and Brownie's eager eyes were not even raised from her book; she scarce heeded what her friend was saying.

"What have you there that is so interesting?" demanded Mattie, after watching her in silence for a few minutes.

"It is a little French story, and so intensely interesting! *Must* we go home now?" and Brownie looked up wistfully at the clock.

"Yes, it is about time. We shall be locked out if we do not get in before ten, you know."

"Oh, well, there is time enough, then. I must read just a little more. I will read aloud, for I know you will like it, the story is so beautifully told. Do you understand French?"

"No."

"Well, no matter, I will translate it as I go along;" and Brownie began and read for ten minutes as fast as her tongue could fly, Mattie soon becoming as deeply interested as herself.

She at length stopped, with a sigh.

"Well, I suppose I must leave it; and they will not allow us to take any of these books away," she said, regretfully.

"It is beautiful, Meta; but, before we go, just read me a little in French. I should like to hear you."

Brownie laughed, and glad of any excuse to return to the book, began to read aloud in a spirited, piquant manner.

"Dear, dear, what a chatter! I should certainly take you to be a Frenchwoman yourself," interrupted Mattie, at length,

adding: "It is not half so interesting to me, though, as when you translated it."

She arose as she spoke, and Brownie, with another wistful look at the entrancing pages, reluctantly laid the book down and followed her example.

They were suddenly arrested, however, by a pleasant voice, saying:

"One moment, if you please, young ladies."

They stopped and looked around.

An old gentleman was sitting just a little back of where Brownie had sat, and he had been a very attentive listener while she was reading so glibly from the French romance. She had not dreamed of having another listener.

He was a venerable, genial-looking man, with flowing white hair and beard, and he wore gold-bowed spectacles, through which his clear blue eyes beamed kindly upon them.

"Pardon me," he said, courteously rising and addressing Brownie, "but I wished to ask if you are a teacher of French?"

"No, sir," replied the young girl, blushing, as she thus became aware that he had been listening to her. "I only read for my own profit and amusement."

"Your accent is remarkably pure. Pardon me again, but where were you instructed in the language?"

"In Philadelphia, sir. I had a teacher who was a native, and who never allowed his class, after they once understood the language, to utter a word in any other tongue during the hours for recitation."

"An excellent plan, young lady. Now, if it would not tax

your patience too far, will you kindly read me two or three more sentences in French from this book?"

The old gentleman took up the book she had but just laid aside, and held it out to her.

Brownie bowed gracefully, wondering what his object could be in thus testing her powers, as she took the book and began reading again fluently.

"Thank you," he said, after a few minutes, during which time he had been intently reading the face of the beautiful girl before him.

He then immediately asked her a question in French.

She smiled brightly, and answered it on the instant.

He asked another, and soon they were in a lively controversy, which was like Choctaw to poor Mattie, who was anxious to get home.

"Do you speak any other language? Can you speak Italian?"

"*A piacere,*" Brownie responded, in liquid tones, which, being interpreted, means "at pleasure."

"And German?"

"I will not say I can speak it as fluently as the others, although I understand it, and can read at sight in the language. But its guttural tones never had that attraction for me that the more musical languages of Italy and France have."

"Are you musical?" demanded the old man, abruptly, after a few moments' thought.

"Yes, sir, I am passionately fond of music," returned Brownie, becoming somewhat embarrassed at being so closely questioned.

"I fear you think I am very presuming, my young friend," he said, noticing her confusion, "but I have a very particular reason for asking you these questions; and now, if you care to humor an old man, will you come into the music-room yonder and let me hear you play a little?"

Brownie had ached to get hold of a piano ever since leaving her dear old home, yet she shrank from displaying her accomplishments in so public a place.

Still the old gentleman was so courteous, and seemed so really interested in her, that she disliked to refuse him, and bowing assent, she beckoned to Mattie, and followed him to the music-room.

To her intense relief, she found it was empty, and sitting down at the piano, she began lightly running her rosy fingers over the white keys.

The tones of the instrument inspired her in a moment, and she soon lost all thought of self and her listeners in her intense enjoyment of the sounds which her soul so loved to hear.

"Sing something, Meta," whispered Mattie, who had stood by in wondering surprise at her friend's accomplishments, and had only waited for a pause to make her request.

Without a demur, she moderated her touch into an accompaniment, and sang that beautiful little song "Your Mission," the words of which had been running in her head ever since she had first entered that disagreeable factory.

She sang the first verses beautifully, but the third was too much for her, and ere the second line was finished she broke down utterly, and bowing her head upon the piano, she had to let the bitter tears have their way.

It was a song which Miss Mehetabel had dearly loved, and many times during the past year, when they had been sitting in the twilight together, she had sung it to her.

It brought back to her so many tender memories of the dear past, which she now believed would be the brightest and best part of her life, that for the time it seemed as if her heart must break with its regretful grief.

It was only for a while, however.

She remembered that she was in the presence of a stranger, and almost as suddenly as she had broken down, she recovered herself, and, rising from the piano-stool, she signified to Mattie her desire to return home.

Upon the first outbreak of her grief, the old gentleman had retired to the farther side of the room, that his presence need not embarrass her.

He now came forward, and she saw that his own eyes were shining with tears.

He held out his hand to her, and there was a note of tenderness in his voice as he said :

"My young friend, forgive me for taxing your patience and good nature to such an extent, and allow me to say that you have given me more pleasure during this half hour than I have experienced this many a day."

Brownie gave him her hand, and while holding it, he asked :

"And now will you allow me just one more question?"

She bowed, wondering what was coming next.

"I do not know what your circumstances may be," he said, with a little embarrassment, "but could you be persuaded to teach?"

"Yes, sir, if I could feel satisfied that I was competent to fill the position offered me," Brownie replied, frankly, her heart bounding at the thought of being released from her present unpromising surroundings. It had been her desire to teach from the first, but no opportunity had offered, and she had resolved to secure the first situation of whatever nature, if honorable, that she could obtain.

"I am happy to hear it," returned the old man. "You ought to be a teacher of languages and music. Your advantages must have been of a very high order, and I compliment you upon your evident improvement of them. Now, if you will kindly give me your name and address, I will endeavor to call upon you at an early date, and talk with you further regarding the matter."

Brownie did as requested, and did not fail to notice his start of surprise when she mentioned her connection with the firm of Ware & Coolidge, nor the contraction of his finely-shaped brows which followed it.

He then presented his card to her, after which he lifted his hat, and bowed to both girls as if they had been the most aristocratic ladies in the land, and then left them.

Brownie looked at the card.

It bore the name of Wm. H. Alcott, M. D.

Wondering what object Wm. H. Alcott, M. D., could have in view regarding her, she carefully put the little bit of pasteboard in her pocket-book, and then the two young girls hastened home, arriving there just as their landlady was about locking the doors for the night.

"You're late," she said, grimly, and with a suspicious look

into Brownie's beautiful face, she added: "I don't believe in girls o' your age walking the streets at this time o' night. I only advertise to take *respectable* boarders."

Brownie's proud spirit boiled at these insulting words, but she did not deign to notice them further than by lifting her proud head a trifle more haughtily, as she swept up the stairs to her own room, followed by the more subdued and trembling Mattie.

CHAPTER X.

CHANGE OF OCCUPATION.

The next day but one, while Brownie was trying her utmost to do her allotted task and get out of the factory an hour earlier, that she might slip down to the reading-room and finish that little French romance in which she had been so deeply interested, Miss Walton came to her and told her, in her grim, curt way, that she was wanted in the office.

Somewhat disturbed by this unexpected summons, she laid aside her work, removed her dainty white apron, then, with heightened color, but a dignified mien, she bent her steps toward the room where she had been received upon her arrival, and which she had not entered since.

Upon opening the door, she was surprised to find sitting, in confidential communication with Mr. Coolidge, Mr. Alcott, the gentleman whose acquaintance she had made in the reading-room two evenings previous.

She bowed slightly to him, and then turned to Mr. Coolidge, who had arisen as she entered, and now greeted her in courteous tones.

"My father-in-law, Mr. Alcott, Miss Douglas," he said, by way of introduction, and Brownie now understood his start of surprise when she gave him her address.

"Be seated, Miss Douglas, if you please," her employer continued, placing a chair for her.

She sat down and folded her little hands in her lap. Both gentlemen noticed her lady-like and self-possessed demeanor, and inwardly commented upon it.

"Miss Douglas, Mr. Alcott has done nothing but rehearse your accomplishments since his meeting with you night before last," said Mr. Coolidge, with an affable smile.

Brownie bowed again, the delicate tint deepening in her cheek at this compliment.

"If what he says is true," the gentleman continued, "and I have no doubt it is, since he is amply qualified to judge, this factory is no place for you."

Brownie blushed a vivid crimson now.

Was she to be turned away on account of her little knowledge?

"One cannot always control one's circumstances, sir," she said, quietly.

"True; I understand you, Miss Douglas. But it may be in the power of others to control them for you in a measure. Now, I have a proposal to make to you. If I understood Mr. Alcott correctly, you would like to teach?"

"Indeed I should like it very much, sir."

"Very well. My family contemplate going abroad in about one week; the steamer sails the tenth, I believe. We have been trying for several weeks to find some person competent to superintend the education of my two younger daughters, and act as a sort of companion and interpreter for them during their

travels. Now, will you accept this position and accompany us to Europe?"

"How long do you contemplate remaining abroad?" Brownie asked, after a few moments spent in thought, and greatly surprised at this offer.

"A year, at least; probably longer, if the girls and their mother enjoy it."

"How old are your daughters, Mr. Coolidge?"

"Viola is sixteen, Alma is fourteen. I have another who is twenty, but I believe she considers her education completed; although I think she said something about studying the languages a little more while she is abroad."

"Have the young ladies completed any course as yet?" Brownie asked, wishing to know something of their attainments before deciding.

"No, I regret to say, they have not. Their mother was unwilling they should attend any public institution, so they have had private teachers, and I am afraid they have not improved their advantages as they should have done."

"Indeed they have not!" exclaimed Mr. Alcott, excitedly. "They have behaved shamefully about it, and are a couple of ignoramuses."

Brownie laughed as he said this, then asked:

"And do you think, sir, that *I* am capable of instructing them, if older and wiser teacher's have failed?"

"Young lady, when you were reading French to me the other evening, I was not impressed wholly by your pronunciation. No, there was a ring of decision in your tones, there was a look of character and firmness in your face, that told me you would

not fail to make a first-class teacher," said the old gentleman, with emphasis.

"Your very youthfulness may help you to win where the others have failed. And, as I told you, it is not altogether an instructress that we want, but a refined and genial companion, and an interpreter also, for none of the family are able to converse fluently in foreign languages," said Mr. Coolidge.

Sixteen and fourteen!

They were trying ages—just the time when girls loved fun and frolic better than anything else in the world.

Was she competent to take charge of them and direct their studies?

She had deemed herself as scarcely more than a child until her aunt died; since then she seemed to have added ten years to her life, and hardly four weeks had elapsed.

It was a hard question to decide.

She longed to accept the position, she longed to go abroad and visit those old countries so fraught with interest, poetry, and romance, and where her aunt had lived and suffered so much. Then the opportunity for storing her own mind, and improving her accent and accomplishments, would be a rich one. But the responsibility! Would it be right for her to assume it? Would she be able to influence these young girls aright?

"Mr. Coolidge," she said, when she had thought of all these things, "I will tell you frankly that I would like this position, which you are so kind to offer me, more than I can express; but I am only eighteen years of age myself, and I do not really feel like deciding whether I am competent to direct the educa-

tion of your daughters or not. The other duties, I think, I could fulfill satisfactorily."

"Have *you* ever completed a regular course of study?" asked Mr. Alcott.

"Yes, sir, a thorough course. I graduated from the high school before I was sixteen, and I have since taken a two years' classical course," replied Brownie.

"You'll do, then," said the old man, with a contented nod of his head.

He was very much interested in the beautiful girl.

"My principal reason for hesitating is, that I have never had any experience in teaching, and could only follow the example of my own teachers, as far as I can remember it."

"You are very truthful and frank, at all events," remarked Mr. Coolidge, smilingly.

"I should not presume to accept this position, sir, by placing myself in a *false* position," replied Brownie, gravely.

"I think with my father-in-law, that you will do, and I feel confident that you will prove faithful to your trust. Shall we consider the bargain closed?" asked her employer, giving her a glance of admiration.

He was more and more astonished at the fact of a lady of her culture and refinement being reduced to the necessity of working in a straw factory for a dollar a day.

"Mr. Coolidge—I—really—" stammered the young girl.

She, too, was astonished that he should desire to close the bargain, without making any inquiries regarding her character or antecedents, and yet she did not know how to broach the subject.

"Ah, I beg your pardon, Miss Douglas," and the man of business looked utterly confused for a moment, "it was an oversight entirely that I did not mention what salary you would receive. Would four hundred a year and expenses meet your acceptance?"

"Make it five, William," interrupted Mr. Alcott, adding: "With those harum-scarum girls it will be none too much; there will be plenty of little knick-knacks that she will want to bring away from the old country, and an extra hundred will be none too much."

"Well, call it five hundred and expenses, then," said Mr. Coolidge.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I had not thought of the salary which I should receive. I was upon the point of saying that—you know nothing about me personally—whether I am, morally, one whom you would wish to receive into your family. I expected you would require references," Brownie said, with dignity.

Mr. Coolidge leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily, while Mr. Alcott beamed satisfaction at her over his gold-bowed spectacles. He recognized the true coin there.

"Really, Miss Douglas," said the former, "you have shown yourself wiser than I in this matter. That is a question which ought, according to the etiquette of the nineteenth century, to have been settled in the first place."

"The very fact of her speaking of the matter herself is reference enough for me," said Mr. Alcott, *sotto voce*.

"However," continued her employer, "I suppose Mrs.

Coolidge would be better pleased to have that matter satisfactorily settled. What reference can you give us, Miss Douglas?"

"That is where I feared there might arise an objection," replied Brownie, with a sad smile, then added: "I have only one friend in the world to whom I feel at liberty just now to refer you; he is in Philadelphia—Mr. Arthur Conrad."

"What! Arthur Conrad, Esq., the noted lawyer of that city?" exclaimed Mr. Alcott, with great interest.

"Yes, sir. He has known me all my life, and I think I may trust him to speak a good word for me to you."

"That will be sufficient, Miss Douglas," said the old man, with a smile. "Arthur Conrad was a classmate of mine years and years ago; he was a splendid fellow, too. I know all about him, and if he knows all about you, we shall not quarrel over further references."

"I will write to him this afternoon," said Mr. Coolidge, "and we shall probably hear in a day or two from him. Then, as this is a mere matter of form, shall we consider that you are engaged to us, and for the salary I have named?"

"Yes, sir; and I thank you for your courtesy, and for the confidence which you have shown to me, an utter stranger. I assure you I will do my utmost to prove myself worthy of the trust you have placed in my hands."

Brownie arose as she spoke, and he saw that tears stood in her grave, beautiful eyes.

Then, bowing to both gentlemen, she returned to her work.

Two, three, four, five days slipped rapidly by, and Brownie heard nothing more from Mr. Coolidge.

She began to be anxious, for she expected that he would cer-

tainly let her know at once upon hearing from Mr. Conrad, and surely he had plenty of time to answer this letter of inquiry.

Saturday night came, and it was the 8th of October.

On Monday the family would sail for Europe, and she hardly knew what to do.

She disliked to seek her employer in his office and question him regarding his movements. She felt that it was his place to seek her, and acquaint her with his desires concerning herself. What if she should be disappointed after all?

As she was removing her apron and putting her table in order, and thinking very soberly of these things, she saw Miss Walton hastening toward her, a smile of satisfaction gleaming upon her face.

"Miss Douglas," she said, loud enough for several of the other girls to hear, "Mr. Coolidge wishes you to come to the office again; he wishes to settle with you."

Now, it was considered quite a disgrace for any one to be called upon to "settle" before the season was over, and Brownie became at once the cynosure of all eyes in her neighborhood.

She understood it, and she knew that Miss Walton had said it aloud purposely to attract attention to her, and mortify her.

She had seemed to possess an especial spite against her ever since Mr. Coolidge had given his command in that authoritative way of his, that she should give her a pleasant seat and *teach* her to wire hats.

She had never before been ordered to do anything contrary to the rules, and it galled her excessively to think that she must

submit to do it for this chit of a girl, as she called Brownie, in speaking of the matter to another overseer.

But Brownie never winced at all. She knew she was mistress of the situation.

She very demurely untied the thread from her waist, piled her hats evenly, sat her chair up close to the table, and then turning innocently to Miss Walton, said :

"This has been a very pleasant place to work in, Miss Walton, and I hope the next occupant will enjoy it as much as I have."

"Ahem ! you're going to leave, then, are you?" demanded the woman, somewhat puzzled by the young girl's collected manner, yet feeling a sort of grim satisfaction that she was going away.

"Yes ; you said Mr. Coolidge wished to settle with me, did you not?"

"That was what I said, Miss Douglas ; I always intend to speak loud enough to be heard," she snapped.

Then she added, with a sneer :

"Perhaps *you* don't mind it, but it never has been considered any *credit* to anybody to be called to 'settle' right in the middle of the season, and *you* hain't been here but three weeks. Pretty faces don't amount to much."

Brownie could not resist firing her little shot after this spiteful speech, for she saw that several of the girls were regarding her suspiciously, and listening eagerly to the conversation.

"Yes, Miss Walton," she said, in her clear, sweet tones, "I know it would not be pleasant to have to settle for having done anything wrong. But I have been expecting some such mes-

sage as this for several days. I suppose I sail for Europe with Mr. Coolidge and his family on Monday."

This created quite a sensation, as Brownie knew it would, and she would never have spoken of it so publicly, had not Miss Walton's insulting speech driven her to it. She could not be disgraced before these young girls. She did not consider it generous ever to boast of prosperity in the presence of others less fortunate.

"Europe! *You!*" ejaculated the astonished dame, her face flushing an angry crimson, as she saw how her spite was turned against herself.

"Yes, and I am anticipating the trip very much."

"Um—I suppose, then, you go as a servant—perhaps as a nursery maid," snapped the woman, vindictively.

"Mr. Coolidge has no young children who need a nurse, I believe, and as to going as a servant—well, maybe I am. I go as instructress in French and German to the young ladies," returned Brownie, serenely, as she brushed the threads from her dress.

"Yes, and she can read French faster than any of us can read English, I can tell you," said Mattie Burnham, taking a hand in the contest, and indignant to see her friend so insulted.

"French, indeed! I don't believe she knows a word of French any more than I do. It's only a high-sounding story she has made up. Whoever heard of a girl educated up to that notch a working in a straw factory? I tell you, girls, *I* don't believe in her at all; she's just been pulling the wool over your eyes all along, and nobody but me has been keen enough

to see through her. Even the boss knuckled to her pretty face, and made me break over the rules to *teach* her, and I, for one, am glad she's got to go."

The angry woman darted glances of fire at the unoffending girl, while some of the young ladies, with whom the fair stranger had been a favorite, murmured, indignantly:

"Shame, shame, Miss Walton!"

"Shame, shame, *I* say, upon those who put on so many fine airs. I always did hate a pretty face; you never can trust them. Humph! French and German! I don't believe one word of it!"

*"*Cela est d'un bon natural, Mademoiselle Walton,*" said Brownie in perfect French, with a little laugh, though a spot of indignant red began to burn upon her own cheek; but she possessed too much natural refinement to retaliate in an unladylike manner.

Yet she could not resist giving the virago a little taste of her accomplishments.

She then turned to the girls, and added, kindly:

"Good-by, my friends, I may never see you again, but I wish you all success in life. †*Au revoir, Mademoiselle Walton. Je ne vous ferai pas de reproches.*"

With a mischievous twinkle in her eye, and a charming little courtesy to the overseer, she nodded her head in kindly farewell to her companions, and with her eyes bright as stars, her cheeks like roses from the excitement of the moment, the

*"That bespeaks a good disposition, Miss Walton."

†"Adieu, Miss Walton; I shall cast upon you no reproaches."

lovely girl swept with all the grace imaginable from the room, leaving the irate overseer boiling with rage over the unknown sounds she had heard, and the girls laughing at her expense.

"Deliver me from such gibberish," sniffed Miss Walton, contemptuously, and trying to hide her chagrin.

"Ha! ha! I told you she could rattle it off. Don't you wish you only knew what she said, Miss Walton?" asked Mattie Burnham, maliciously, as she, too, left the room, yet feeling sad at heart that she was to lose the friend whom she was learning to love.

CHAPTER XL

BROWNIE AT THE COOLIDGE MANSION.

Mr. Coolidge glanced up with a smile of welcome, as Brownie, more beautiful than ever with the excitement of her little encounter with Miss Walton, entered the office.

"Miss Walton said you wished to see me, sir," she said, simply.

"Yes, Miss Douglas, as we sail on Monday, I thought best to close your account with the firm to-night."

"You have heard from Mr. Conrad, then, I suppose," she said, taking it for granted, while her face became radiant with hope.

She so longed to go abroad with the Coolidges.

Mr. Coolidge shook his head.

"No, Miss Douglas, I have not. I wrote immediately, but, receiving no reply, after waiting three days, I telegraphed, and his clerk returned word to-day that he had left town for a week."

Brownie's countenance fell, and she grew very pale.

All her bright hopes crumbled to dust, and nothing remained for her but to plod wearily along day by day.

"I am very sorry," she said, regretfully. "Of course, it is settled that I am not to go with you."

"Why not?" he asked, quickly, adding: "You jump at conclusions, do you not? I told you, I believe, that, as we sailed on Monday, I wished to close your account to-night. That does not look much like *not going*, does it?"

She had forgotten his words, and her face lighted a trifle at this; but she asked:

"But would you be justified, sir, in taking me without a recommendation?"

"I think so, and I think you are over-sensitive upon that point. I never met a governess before without a recommendation who did not try to pass the circumstance over as lightly as possible," returned the gentleman, with an amused smile.

She colored vividly red at his words. They seemed to her almost like an insinuation that all was not right with her.

"I only desire that you and Mrs. Coolidge should be entirely satisfied," she said, with proud dignity.

"Miss Douglas," he said, fixing a keen look upon her face, "I told you, when we first talked this matter over, that I considered it a mere form. I have been fully satisfied from the first that you are a *lady*, and amply qualified for the position I offer you. Now, if you will assure me that there has been nothing in your life, morally speaking, which would debar you from entering my family, I can rest satisfied, and there will be time enough in the future to write to Mr. Conrad."

Anything in her life, morally speaking!

A little smile of scorn curled her red lips, and the color leaped again to her very brow; but she lifted her clear, truthful eyes to his, and he was answered, even before she said, with conscious pride:

"There *is* nothing, there *has been* nothing in my life which any one could question."

"I knew it," he answered; "and now I have a request to make, and that is, that you will allow me to send my carriage for you this evening. There remains only about a day and a half before we sail, and my family would like to become somewhat acquainted with you beforehand."

Brownie shrank from this ordeal, but she knew it must come sooner or later, and the quicker it was over with the better for all parties.

"Very well, sir," she answered.

"At what time shall I send for you?"

"An hour will give me ample time to make all needful preparations for the change."

"It is five o'clock now. Then at six precisely the carriage shall call for you. We dine at half-past, when you will meet my family. Now, about this account; it is not a very large one, Miss Douglas," he said, smiling, and turning to the books.

After a moment, he continued, with some hesitation:

"Allow me to give you a check on account. You may wish to make some purchases before leaving New York."

Brownie drew herself up like a little princess.

"If you will please pay me what I have *earned*, sir, it will be all I require, thank you."

"Whew!" was the gentleman's internal comment; "our pretty employee has some spirit."

He ran his eye quickly over the figures, and then paid her

just sixteen dollars and a half, the amount of her earnings for three weeks and two days.

"Thank you; that is correct," she said, after counting it; then, with a bow, she withdrew, a strange feeling of pride and independence in her heart that for three weeks she had supported herself by the labor of her own hands.

True, it would take about fourteen of it to pay for her board and washing, leaving her only two dollars and fifty cents surplus.

But if she could do this at the very outset, she had no fear of the future, if God gave her health and strength.

And just at this moment the future looked very bright to her.

She was to receive five hundred dollars a year, and she smiled to think how large the sum looked to her now, besides her expenses and the opportunity of a year of travel in charming Europe.

She had been quite a traveler in her own country, having spent her long vacations in visiting different points of interest with Miss Mehetabel, so that she was well prepared to speak of "Columbia's" fair scenes, and compare them with the older if not grander views of other countries.

Brownie arrived at the Coolidge mansion in season to be introduced to the family before dinner was served.

She did not feel particularly drawn toward either Mrs. Coolidge or her eldest daughter.

They were evidently worldlings, and received her with an air of superiority and patronage that was intensely galling to our proud-spirited little Douglas.

The younger girls, Viola and Alma, were more simple and affectionate, and although somewhat hoidenish, yet she felt assured that they had kind hearts, and promised herself some pleasure with them.

After dinner the whole family repaired to the drawing-room, and the girls being anxious to know what the new governess could do, desired to hear her play and sing.

She gratified them, playing and singing for an hour, then tempting them from the piano, she made herself so sweet and engaging that they were charmed with her, while even Mrs. Coolidge and Miss Isabel relaxed their haughtiness somewhat, though they both considered her too pretty and polished for the latter's interest. She wished no rival in the way at present.

"If only Wilbur will not lose his senses and fall in love with her at first sight," Isabel said to her mother, when they had withdrawn to Mrs. Coolidge's boudoir to discuss Brownie's merits.

"Never fear, dear; Wilbur knows we would never tolerate a wife for him unless she was his equal in society," replied the matron, complacently.

"But you know that sometimes young men fall in love with a pretty face, and become entangled before they know it."

Miss Isabel was evidently very jealous of Brownie's beauty and accomplishments.

She had not been at all pleased that her father should engage a governess without consulting her own and her mother's pleasure.

This feeling was shared by Mrs. Coolidge, but she had

learned wisdom from long experience, and did not openly oppose her liege lord's authority upon any matter.

"I think you are worrying about nothing," she said, in reply to her daughter. "I'm sure I can't see anything so very beautiful about Miss Douglas," and she cast a proud look at her own fashionable darling.

"Where are your eyes, mamma?" was the impatient reply. "Her features are perfect; she has the loveliest complexion and color I have ever seen in any face; her hands and feet are at least two sizes smaller than either mine or Viola's, and her form just dainty enough to suit a fastidious young man like Wilbur."

"Really, Isabel, you must have spent considerable time inspecting the new governess to serve up such a catalogue of her charms," remarked Mrs. Coolidge, contemptuously, adding: "Perhaps you are afraid she may attract others, and interfere with your own prospects."

"She may; who knows?" replied the envious girl.

"Well, if you really think there is danger, I will try and persuade your father to get rid of her even now. But I am of the opinion that you have exaggerated her good looks; I see nothing so very noticeable about her, and I'm sure she dresses plainly enough to suit anybody. She does not wear a single ornament—nothing but those soft ruches at her neck and wrists."

"Her *dress* is all right, but hers is a style of beauty that does not need dress to set it off. She would look lovely in anything. But it would never do to think of sending her away now. Papa is bewitched with her, and I do believe it

grandpa was a young man he would fall in love with her himself; he has done nothing but sound her praises ever since he met her in the reading-room."

"Pshaw! Isabel, how extremely foolish you are; do try and get such nonsense out of your head. But I promise I will take care that Wilbur does not see much of her, nor any other young gentleman whom we may meet abroad," said Mrs. Coolidge, resolutely.

She had no notion of allowing any one to interfere with her son's or daughter's interests in life.

"If you can only put that resolution in force she may prove very useful to us, after all. Her accent is every bit as pure as Monsieur Renaud's, and I must confess that her music is perfectly bewildering. She will save all need of music-masters or teachers in the languages, which will be quite an item; it has cost me more than her salary every year for my music and French," said Isabel.

"True, dear, and she will also be very valuable as an interpreter in our shopping and sight-seeing expeditions abroad. But to turn to more agreeable things. I want you, Isabel, to do your utmost to make a brilliant match while we are in Europe. With your father's purse, your face, figure, and appearance, I think you ought to win somebody worth having."

"I hope I may, mamma; I should really enjoy being 'lady' somebody," and the vain girl got up and sailed over to the full-length mirror to survey herself.

It was rather an attractive figure which looked back at her. She was tall, and had a queenly carriage. Her complexion was very fair, and she had flaxen hair, which was dressed in the

height of style. Her eyes were pale blue, and her features rather small and delicate. Her manners, when she chose, were quite fascinating, and she had been quite a favorite in society for a year; but she lacked the character and freshness with which Brownie's every feature and movement were replete.

"Is it not time for Wilbur to come, mamma?" she asked, as, satisfied with the survey of herself, she turned from the glass.

"Yes; he ought to have been here an hour ago," answered Mrs. Coolidge, glancing at her watch.

Scarce were the words uttered when the door-hell gave forth a clamorous peal; another moment, and there was a manly step on the stair, a deep, rich voice called "Mother, Isabel," then the door swung open, and the only son and heir was received with open arms and joyous exclamations of greeting.

Wilbur Coolidge was an exceedingly handsome young man of twenty-two years, with a face that challenged all criticism—bright, careless, defiant, full of humor, and possessing a gleam of poetry—a face that girls judge instantly and always admire. He had a frank, clear eye of deepest blue, brown hair tinged with gold, a smiling mouth, from which, when he spoke, there gleamed two rows of white, handsome teeth. Yet it was a mouth one could not quite trust—there was something wanting which made one feel that he lacked depth, that there was no great chivalry in his nature, no grand treasure of manly truth, no touch of heroism in his soul. There were few women who would have read him thus critically, yet Brownie did at a glance, when, descending the stairs arm in arm with his sister Isabel, they met face to face, and she was obliged to present him to her.

"My brother, Miss Douglas," she said, briefly and coldly, and with a haughty lifting of her head.

Miss Douglas greeted him with quiet politeness, and passed on; but not before she had caught his stare of surprise and look of admiration as his eyes for a moment rested on her face, then swept her dainty form from head to foot.

"And who is Miss Douglas?" he asked, after they had passed beyond her hearing.

"Oh, she is a young person whom grandpa came across in one of the public libraries, and persuaded papa to secure as governess to the girls," Miss Isabel answered, with a yawn.

"Governess! Young person, indeed! Why, if I ever saw the mark of the true and culturcd lady in any one, I do in her," he replied, with enthusiasm.

"Nonsense, Wilbur! I hope you do not allow your head to be turned by every pretty face you chance to meet."

"Not I," and the young man tossed his head, with a gay laugh. "But this Miss Douglas is something more than pretty. Hers is a face which, if a man learned to love, he would gladly, Jacob-like, serve twice seven years for the sake of making its owner his wife."

This was said partly to tease his sister, for he well knew her weak points; yet, it must be confessed, he had been startled by Brownie's wondrous beauty.

"Pshaw! Wilbur, I shall get entirely out of patience with you if you run on like that; and let me warn you beforehand, if mamma discovers you are 'sweet' on the governess, it will prove most disastrous to the poor girl's prospects, for she will post her off without any ceremony."

The frown upon Isabel Coolidge's brow as she said this was anything but attractive.

The young man saw at once that it would not do to betray too much interest in the beautiful governess, and he determined to govern himself accordingly, so, with another light laugh, he said:

"Don't be disturbed, sister mine. We men, I admit, have an eye for the beautiful, be it in princess or maid. I suppose I may admire Miss Douglas from a distance, as one would admire a picture, with no thought of possessing it. By the way, to change the subject, what is father going to do with the horses while we are away?"

"Send them up to the farm, I believe."

"When do they go?"

"Monday morning, I think."

"Let us go out to the stable, then, and take a farewell look at them," proposed Wilbur, cunningly.

"Not I, thank you! I've no notion of being perfumed with the scent of the stable if any one should call. You can go if you choose, and I will wait for you in the drawing-room."

The young man gladly availed himself of the permission, laughing meanwhile in his sleeve that his artifice had succeeded so well. He did not particularly enjoy a *tete-a-tete* with the frivolous girl.

He knew well enough that his fastidious sister would not accompany him to the stable, and he longed to be by himself, that he might feast upon the remembrance of that lovely face, which had flashed like a gleam from Paradise upon him.

"She is the loveliest girl I have ever met, and I will see more

of her, Isabel and the maternal to the contrary notwithstanding," was his mental resolve, as he paced absently back and forth in the stable, wholly unconscious of his stated object in visiting the place.

At the end of a half hour he returned to the house, hoping to catch another glimpse of the object of his musings; but Viola mentioned that she had gone to her room for the night.

He heaved a sigh of regret, and then turned to make himself agreeable to some callers who had dropped in to bid the family farewell and wish them a prosperous voyage to the old country.

CHAPTER XII.

ADRIAN DREDMOND.

The day of sailing came at last.

A good deal of confusion prevailed in getting the family, with their endless supply of luggage, from the Coolidge mansion to the steamer; and in the midst of it all, Wilbur managed several times to escape the argus eyes of his watchful mother and jealous sister, and get a word with Brownie.

He would know if all her trunks and boxes had been attended to; if she had forgotten anything, and if she was sure she had made all needful provision for herself against sea-sickness, and a number of other useless questions.

Every hour in her presence only served to enthrall him more hopelessly. He never wearied of looking upon her bright face, nor of listening to the sweet tones of her voice. She wove a sweet spell about him.

Miss Douglas, however, responded very quietly, and with some dignity, whenever he addressed her.

She was observing enough to perceive that his attentions to her were anything but acceptable to the Coolidge family; so, without appearing to do so, she avoided him, and devoted herself to her young charges, Viola and Alma.

But a little incident occurred, just as they were going aboard

the steamer, which was to influence the young girl's whole after life.

Brownie was the last to step aboard, excepting Wilbur, and not paying strict heed to her steps, she caught her foot in a coil of rope, stumbled, and would have fallen had she not been quickly caught and upheld by a strong arm. The shock was so severe that, overcome with dizziness, she lay almost unconscious for a moment in the stranger's clasp.

"Has she fainted?" asked Wilbur Coolidge, in anxious tones, as he sprang forward, too late to render service.

"I think not. It was only the shock; she will rally in a moment," were the words which Brownie, on coming to herself, heard in such deep, rich tones, that she was conscious of a sudden thrill running through her whole frame.

She opened her eyes, and found herself looking up into a face that was strange, yet familiar.

For one instant her eyes met his, and their souls met through that glance. Then, with a vivid blush of shame staining her fair cheek, as she realized she was being held in the arms of a stranger, Brownie gently disengaged herself, and tried to stand alone.

"Brownie Douglas!" the stranger murmured, in wondering surprise, and as if the words were forced from him by some previous memory.

As she caught them the color again flew to her face, and he, seeing her embarrassment, hastened to say:

"I beg your pardon, but my surprise made me forget myself. Will you take my arm and allow me to conduct you below? I fear you are not quite strong yet."

"Thank you," Brownie began, when Wilbur Coolidge suddenly interfered.

"I will attend to the lady, sir, thanking you kindly for the service you have already rendered her," he said, somewhat haughtily, and offering Miss Douglas his own arm.

She took it, and with a grateful little bow to the strange gentleman, and one more rapid glance into his fine eyes, she allowed Mr. Coolidge to lead her away.

All this had not occupied more than two minutes, and yet during those two minutes three hearts received a shock from which they never recovered.

"Who was that gentleman, Miss Douglas?" Wilbur Coolidge demanded, with a grave face, when they had left him, and he was carefully conducting her down the companionway.

"I do not know; I have never met him before, and yet—" was Brownie's hesitating reply, while her face wore a puzzled look.

"And yet what?" asked the young man, trying to speak carelessly, yet with the vestige of a frown.

"It seems to me as if I have seen his face at some time, but where, I do not remember." And the perplexed look still remained upon her countenance.

"He seemed to know *you*. He called you 'Brownie Douglas.' Is that your name?"

The color flamed again into her cheeks at the question. She had noticed the stranger's involuntary utterance of her pet name, and had been strangely moved by it.

"It used to be when I had dear friends."

She grew sad and pale again at the memories which came thronging upon her at the sound of the dear old name.

"I cannot understand though how *he* should come to know it," she added, after a moment.

"Brownie—Brownie—it just suits you, Miss Douglas," said Mr. Coolidge, taking in at one admiring glance the shining coils of brown hair, the liquid chestnut eyes, and the long, dark lashes which just now half concealed them.

"My name is Mehetabel Douglas, Mr. Coolidge," Brownie said, coldly, and with dignity, not relishing his familiarity, nor the tender cadence which his voice had assumed.

He laughed aloud.

"Pardon me," he said, "but such a name for *you* is an abomination. Don't you ever shorten it?"

"I do not think it is very euphonious myself, Mr. Coolidge, and therefore, when I write it, I shorten it into Meta," she explained, smiling at his indignation, and disarmed by his frankness.

"*That* is quite respectable. But what is the matter? I fear you have not recovered from your fall yet. Are you sure you are not injured by it?" he asked, anxiously, seeing she had grown very white again.

"No; but it gave me quite a shock, and I think the motion of the boat prolongs the dizziness. But I shall do very well if I can only sit down."

"If this gentle swaying affects you so, I do not know what you will do when we come to move," he replied, as he hastened toward the saloon with her.

Here they found the rest of the family quite anxious at their

non-appearance; and his mother and Isabel were not in the best frame of mind in the world when they saw the governess come in leaning upon the arm of Wilbur.

"Miss Douglas has had a fall, mother, and is faint; please let her have your vinaigrette," he explained, as he carefully seated her upon a sofa.

"Thanks, but I have one," Brownie said, and straightway produced one from her little traveling-bag, which caused Miss Isabel's pale eyes to expand with wonder.

It was a costly little trifle of solid gold, and its stopple was curiously formed and set with pearls.

She prized it, and loved to use it, because it had been one of the things which had been used last by Miss Mehetabel.

"Do look, mamma! Wherever did she get it?" whispered Isabel.

"I'm sure I don't know, child; evidently she belonged to a different sphere in life before she came to us. I only wish your grandfather had been at the poles that night she went to the library to beguile him with her pretty face," returned the maternal Coolidge, impatiently.

"Oh, you begin to think she *is* pretty, do you?" sneered her dutiful daughter.

"Wilbur evidently thinks so, if I do not," was the moody reply.

Brownie's quick ears had caught every word, and she very coldly refused the glass of ice-water which the young man in question at that moment brought her.

She then settled herself upon the couch and closed her eyes, thus intimating her desire to be left alone.

Upon the deck above them there paced a young man with bent head and thoughtful brow.

He was tall and exceedingly well-formed, his broad, full chest and square shoulders giving one the impression of great strength and powers of endurance.

He looked the Englishman every inch, and a very noble one withal.

He had a stately way with him that impressed one at first sight as if he were "to the manor born."

He was not handsome, like Wilbur Coolidge, but he possessed a face of decision and truth.

He had deep, thoughtful gray eyes, a good mouth with kindly lines about it, and an expression of great firmness and character withal. It was a true, good face—a face to be trusted under any circumstances.

"How does she happen to be here, I wonder?" he muttered, with a far-away look out over the waters. "I know she left Philadelphia soon after her aunt's death," he continued, "and though Gordon tried hard to find where she had gone, he could not. She faded out of the fashionable world in which she used to move as completely and suddenly as a fallen star drops out of existence. I'm glad now I did not leave the button with him, as he wished me to do; no, I'll give it to her with my own hands, or I will keep it forever."

He walked absently to the side of the steamer, and stood looking into the turbid waters beneath; and not long after two ladies drew near, and he overheard the following conversation:

"Mamma, I tell you we shall have trouble with that governess as sure as the world."

"I hope not," replied the elder lady, with a troubled look.

"Wilbur is over head and ears in love with her already, and it will be just like her to lead him on for the sake of gaining a good position in the world," and the young lady's tone was exceedingly disagreeable.

"Well, it cannot be helped now; you must make yourself so interesting and agreeable that he will prefer your society to that of any one else; you must monopolize him during the voyage, and when we are once settled. I will see that *she* does not have any spare time to flirt."

"Talk about her having a fall," continued Isabel Coolidge, indignantly. "Alma saw the whole proceeding, and says it was nothing but a stumble. She said a gentleman caught her, and saved her from going to the floor, and she lay back in his arms as helplessly and gracefully as any heroine in a novel."

"I have not much doubt that she is artful, and would not scruple to take advantage of Wilbur's weakness for pretty faces, notwithstanding she appears so meek and demure."

"Meek and demure, mamma! Why, she is anything but that. She has the manners and bearing of a little queen!" interrupted Miss Coolidge.

"Well, but she is very quiet, and does not *appear* to be seeking his attentions; but, as I said before, we cannot help it now; all we can do is to watch them closely."

"Never fear but that we can do *that* with *our* sharp eyes; and with you and I both on the lookout, I reckon we can manage them," laughed the young lady.

"Yes; and if we find any indications of anything serious upon Wilbur's part, I will find some excuse for shipping her

off our hands as soon as we land. I will *not* have my son's prospects ruined by a poverty-stricken governess," replied the haughty woman, sternly.

They moved away from the place where they had been standing, and the young Englishman resumed his pacings, a smile of ineffable scorn curling his fine lips.

"A poverty-stricken governess indeed!" he muttered between his teeth; "and I would not have *her* prospects for future happiness ruined by the son of *such* a woman! Poor child!" and his face softened into tenderness; "then she has been reduced to that cruel necessity, and she will have a hard time of it if left to the tender mercies of those two. At all events," he continued, "I will manage some way to get acquainted with her before the voyage is ended, and return her cuff-button. I shall miss it, too, for it has lain so long in its place that it seems like a precious talisman."

He took it from the pocket of his vest as he spoke—that beautiful little trifle of black enamel and gold, with its sparkling initial in the center, inclosed in its brilliant circle.

He turned it over, and read the tiny letters engraved on the back.

"Brownie!" he murmured. "I could not help speaking her name as I held her in my arms; and how beautiful she looked when the lovely color leaped into her face as she heard it. Never mind, when I put this into her own little hands, I will explain it all."

He replaced the button in his pocket, with a deep sigh, and then turned his attention to the steamer, as she cast off her moorings and began to move out into the mighty deep.

The reader has doubtless recognized in the stranger the person of Adrian Dredmond, one of the young men who stood in the vestibule of the Art Gallery at Philadelphia on the day when Miss Huntington met with such a series of accidents to her elaborate toilet.

He had come from the old country to attend the world's wonderful exposition, and was now returning—but more of him hereafter.

CHAPTER XIII.

DRESSING FOR THE OPERA.

The passage proved to be an exceedingly rough one.

The Coolidge family were all confined to their state-rooms with that much-dreaded enemy, sea-sickness, excepting Mr. Coolidge, Wilbur, and Viola.

The two former attended to the wants of the wife and sisters, while Viola devoted herself faithfully to Miss Douglas.

Viola Coolidge was at heart a gentle and loving girl, resembling her brother somewhat in looks, and possessing his sunny, good-natured temperament.

During her attendance upon Brownie, who was so patient and grateful for every little service, she became deeply attached to her, and henceforth the young governess had a brave little champion in all the trials and difficulties which beset her path.

Brownie suffered more than any of the party, not being able to leave her state-room during all the voyage.

Upon their arrival at Liverpool, she was so weak and wan that Mr. Coolidge and Wilbur were obliged to bear her in their arms from the boat to the carriage which was to convey them to their hotel, much to the annoyance and disgust of Isabel and her mother.

Adrian Dredmond had waited in vain for the opportunity he

had so desired. He had not once seen Brownie during the voyage. He managed to scrape acquaintance with Viola one day when she came on deck to breathe the fresh air, and not a day passed thereafter but that he sought her out, and made inquiries concerning her charge.

He also saw much of Wilbur Coolidge, and came to like the careless, good-natured fellow right well.

But they never once exchanged a word regarding the object which constantly occupied the thoughts of both.

As by tacit consent, they avoided all mention of Brownie—some instinctive feeling seeming to warn them that it would not be a congenial topic to talk upon.

Adrian stood by when they carried her to the carriage, and a feeling of pain smote his heart as he saw her wan face and sunken eyes.

"I cannot give it to her now, but I will seek an opportunity. I *will* see her again," he breathed to himself.

They lifted her into the carriage, shut the door, and drove away.

"Brownie Douglas—the name is as sweet as she looks—good-by, my Brownie; we shall meet again," he murmured; and, with a deep tenderness in his heart for her, Adrian Dredmond went his own way.

From Liverpool, the Coolidges, after a few days of rest, went to London, where they proposed establishing their headquarters for three or four months, while they made excursions about the country.

Here they took a house in the neighborhood of Regent's

Park, and, to Isabel's delight, entered at once upon the gayeties of the season.

Brownie's heart is stirred with various emotions as she finds herself thus settled among the very scenes of her aunt's former life.

Here Miss Mehetabel lived when she was a girl; here she was wooed and won; here she had lived that short, bright year, loving and beloved, and which was followed by a life-time of mourning and sadness.

She wondered if Lord Dunforth were still living, and if it would be her lot while abroad to meet him. She hoped so; and she was confident that she should recognize him, from the picture which was now in her possession, even though so many years had passed, and he was an old man of over sixty.

Of course, she never expected to meet him as an equal, or even speak to him; but she longed for just one look into his face, to see if he had fulfilled the promise of his early manhood, and to assure herself that he was the noble, high-minded knight which her little romantic heart had pictured him from Miss Mehetabel's description.

During the first hours of the day Miss Douglas and her pupils dived deep into the mystic lore; and so charming did she make their studies, and so interested did she appear in everything pertaining to their welfare, that, to their credit be it said, they applied themselves with the utmost diligence to their tasks, and soon gave promise of becoming quite proficient.

The afternoons were devoted to sight-seeing and riding, the evenings to receiving company, attending drawing-rooms, the opera, or the theater.

One morning Wilbur came home in considerable excitement, and throwing some tickets upon the table, said:

"There, mother, are some tickets for her Majesty's Opera, and I want every member of this family to attend, for there are wonderful attractions to-night."

"How so?"

"Titiens, Kellogg, Berttini, Nilsson, and others are advertised; and it will be a treat which one does not often get," he replied.

"Then, of course, we must all go, and the girls will be delighted that you remembered them, for they are not often allowed to appear in company, you know," she said, smiling.

"And Miss Douglas, too, mother; I procured a ticket for her," he added.

Mrs. Coolidge demurred at this.

"But Miss Douglas is in deep mourning; it would not be suitable for her to appear with us in her black garments," she said.

"Pshaw! she can wear something else for once. It is a shame to debar her from such a luxury; any one can see that she is passionately fond of music, and *I* should feel *mean* to take all the others and leave her behind," he returned, indignantly.

Mrs. Coolidge thought a moment, and finally assented.

She well knew that too much opposition often whetted passion, and she had no desire to provoke Wilbur into being a champion for the governess, and accordingly gave her consent.

He met Brownie in the hall a few moments afterward, and told her of the arrangement for the evening.

Her face lighted with pleasure.

It was long since she had attended an opera.

She loved it, and the thought of listening once more to the entrancing strains of those great artists filled her with delight.

"You will go, Brown—Miss Douglas?" he asked, nearly forgetting himself.

He never thought of her now excepting as "Brownie," and no one but himself knew how very dear the fair girl was becoming to him day by day.

"Thank you. I should enjoy it very much, if it will not conflict with any arrangements Mrs. Coolidge may have made," she said.

"It will not. I have just been talking with her about it; and, Miss Douglas—" he contined, hesitatingly.

"Well?" she answered, looking up with an encouraging smile.

"Please, if I may be so bold as to make the request, wear something not *quite* so somber as this," and he just touched the black dress.

Her face grew very sad and her eyes filled with tears. Miss Douglas had been dead just two months, and the thought of gay attire seemed unsuitable to her.

"Forgive me if I pain you, but I would like to see you for once as bright as the others," the young man added, and then passed on.

She knew her black dress would not be suitable for the opera, and yet she hesitated about changing it for two reasons.

Her own feelings rebelled against it, as if it were doing a wrong to Miss Mehetabel.

"And yet," she said, thinking it over, "I know auntie would not wish me to deprive myself of the pleasure of attending the opera, and I know, also, she would not like me to appear in such a place in black."

The other reason was the fear of displeasing Mrs. Coolidge if she made any change.

But that matter was settled for her by that lady herself. She came to her room during the day, repeating the invitation which Wilbur had given her, and concluded by saying:

"Miss Douglas, have you not something a little more appropriate that you could wear? This black is hardly the thing."

"I have several nice dresses which I used to wear upon such occasions, but I fear they are hardly suitable for my position now," Brownie replied, with heightened color, for the first time alluding to the change in her circumstances.

"Ah!" said the matron, in surprise, and pleased with this evidence of the governess' modesty; then she added, patronizingly: "You have seen better days, I presume?"

"Yes, madam."

"Well, I leave the matter to your own judgment, only do not wear black, nor white, for Alma will wear that. Indeed," she added, after a moment's thought, "if you *have* a nice dress, Miss Douglas, wear it, for, as we are all going together, I do not care how nicely our party appears," and with this affable expression, the lady withdrew, leaving Brownie to con the matter over in her own mind.

An amused smile curled her lips at the expression "if you *have* a nice dress," and when the door closed after Mrs. Coolidge, she laughed outright.

Evidently she thought if the governess had seen better days they could not have been very remarkable ones.

She crossed the room, and opened the trunk in which she had packed the richer portion of her clothing, and took out her evening dresses.

The decision was a difficult matter, and it was more than an hour before she could make up her mind which one of those beautiful garments it would do to wear.

She had no desire to outshine Miss Isabel.

But that young lady, with all her love for show and fashion, had nothing more elegant than Brownie's own wardrobe contained.

She at length fixed upon a delicate maize-colored silk, trimmed with puffings of soft illusion, and ruffles of fine thread lace.

She had only worn it once, and it was as fresh as if it had never been put on.

The fichu of illusion and thread lace, the tinted gloves, the beautiful point lace handkerchief, and elegantly-carved pearl-handled fan, all lay at the bottom of the box just as she had left them when she had last worn them.

When the hour came for dressing, she arrayed herself with a throbbing heart.

Her eyes grew bright with anticipation, her cheeks rosy with excitement.

Involuntarily she found herself humming snatches from different operas, and for the time she felt almost like the gay young girl she had been less than three months ago.

She had nearly completed her toilet, when Viola came sweeping in, lovely in blue silk and white tulle.

In her hands she carried a most exquisite bouquet of flowers.

She stood breathless on the threshold as she caught sight of Brownie.

"Miss Douglas," she at length exclaimed, "how perfectly lovely you are!"

"Thank you, Viola; but you are altogether too enthusiastic in your compliments," Brownie returned, with a smile.

Yet, as she glanced into the mirror, she grew suddenly conscious, and blushed with a sense of her own beauty.

Her hair was drawn away from her broad, low forehead, and knotted gracefully at the back of her small head.

Her beautiful neck gleamed through the misty fichu, and her rounded arms were only half concealed by the fall of delicate lace from her sleeves.

The dress was cut *en train*, making her slight figure look taller, and, with the proud poise of her head, almost regal.

She wore a finely-wrought chain of gold about her neck, from which was suspended the beautiful coral cross, set with brilliants, which her aunt had given her at the same time she gave her the other contents of the casket.

The butterfly hair ornament to match she had fastened in her glossy hair, and it sparkled and gleamed with her every movement.

Her lip had quivered, and the tears had started to her eyes when she took them from their velvet bed, for it brought vividly to her mind that last sad interview with her aunt.

"Auntie," she said, as she softly touched her lips to them, "you told me to wear them; I have nothing that will look half so well with this dress, and my heart is full of love for you to-night."

She surely was lovely, as Viola said.

"I'm afraid your mamma will think me too fine," she said, half regretfully, and struck by the young girl's words.

"But," she added, "this is the simplest thing I have, unless I wear white, and your mamma said Alma was to dress in white."

"Miss Douglas, who—what are you?" Viola asked, an expression of perplexity on her young face.

"My dear, must I repeat my dreadful name? I am Mehetabel Douglas, and a poor governess," Brownie said, gayly.

"I know that, of course; but haven't you been a fine lady at some time in your life?" demanded the young girl, impatiently.

"That depends altogether upon what you mean by the term 'fine lady,' Viola."

"Why, one who has everything rich and elegant, and who goes among fashionable people."

Brownie smiled at this definition of the term, but she replied, gravely, and a little sadly:

"My dear, you have been so kind to me, I will gratify you in this, only please remember that I do not care to have it spoken of again. A year ago—yes, and much less—my prospects in life were as bright as your own are now. But death and misfortune took everything from me, and I was obliged to do something for my own support."

"Did you live in an elegant house, and have servants, horses, and carriages?"

"Yes."

"Have you always had these things until now?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then you are every bit as good as we are, and it's a shame that you are not treated as an equal," burst from Viola's lips, indignantly, as she remembered all Isabel's sneers about "the governess," and her mother's scathing remarks regarding "that person, Miss Douglas."

"Hush, Viola!" Brownie said, quietly, yet again smiling at the child's naive remark. "Shall I tell you what my idea of a fine lady is?"

"Yes, do," Viola said, eagerly.

"In the first place, it is to be always kind and courteous to every one; to respect one's self, so that one would never do a mean or cruel act; and never to triumph over or hold one's self above others who may be less fortunate in life."

"That's it! that's it! I only wish mamma and Isabel could hear you. They think they are fine ladies, but, dear Miss Douglas, I'd rather be one after your standard, and I *will!*" and the impulsive girl threw her arms around Brownie's neck and kissed her heartily.

Brownie was afraid she had made a mistake in speaking thus.

She had not the least thought of casting any reflections when she spoke.

She thought it wise now to change the subject, and asked:

"Where did you get such lovely flowers, dear?"

"Oh, I nearly forgot! Wilbur sent them to you, with his compliments," Viola said, apologetically, as she gave them to her.

Miss Douglas colored a vivid crimson.

She did not like to take gifts from him, knowing the feelings of Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel; and, at the same time, she did not like to wound him by refusing them.

So she compromised the matter by dividing them.

"They are very beautiful, dear, and it is very kind of your brother to remember me. But there are so many of them, let me fasten this spray in your hair."

She took the loveliest cluster of white moss-rose buds from the bouquet.

"There, see for yourself. Is is not an improvement?" she asked, as her deft fingers wove it among Viola's golden braids.

"Thank you," the young girl said, her face beaming with pleasure, as she caught the reflection of a fair, innocent face, surrounded by massive coils of luxuriant hair, among which the buds, with their green leaves, nestled lovingly.

"But you have given me the prettiest you had, Miss Douglas," she added, regretfully.

"And why shouldn't I, dear? I have not forgotten who was so kind and faithful to a poor, sick, useless little body when we were crossing the ocean," Brownie playfully replied, as she kissed the flushed cheek.

She then selected a few flowers for herself, and telling Viola that she was ready, they both descended to the drawing-room.

A hush of expectation followed their entrance.

Isabel's eagle eye took in at one sweeping glance the simple

elegance of the governess' toilet, and her astonishment was plainly visible as she noticed those two almost priceless ornaments which she wore upon her bosom and in her hair.

"Really, Miss Douglas, you have bloomed, haven't you?" she said, sarcastically.

"Indeed, Miss Douglas, I did not expect to see you quite so radiant," said Mrs. Coolidge, in the same tones, and wondering where under the sun her governess got such elegant jewels.

Brownie blushed deeply at Isabel's insult, but did not notice her remark, except by a little lifting of her proud head.

To Mrs. Coolidge, however, she said, courteously:

"Do I not meet your approbation, madam? If not, any change you may choose to suggest I will gladly make."

"They'll spoil all her pleasure, the vixens," was Wilbur's inward comment, as his eyes gloated upon her wonderful beauty, and gleamed with a stronger ray of love than he had henceforth dared betray.

Mrs. Coolidge knew she had tied her own tongue by what she had said to Brownie in her own room, but she inwardly resolved that the same thing should never happen again.

"Your costume is rather rich for your position," she remarked, with well-assumed indifference, "but it is of no consequence for once."

Then, as they left the house, she whispered to her daughter:

"No one need know but that she is a guest."

"It's fine, isn't it, to have your governess outshine your own daughter? I do hope this night's experience will teach you wisdom," grumbled the envious girl.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SCENE.

Her Majesty's Opera, Drury Lane, was crowded to its utmost capacity when our party arrived.

But having secured a private box, this circumstance did not inconvenience them in the least.

Wilbur Coolidge took care, after his mother and Isabel were comfortably seated, that Miss Douglas should have a place where she could command a good view of the stage.

He was disgusted with their treatment of the lovely governess, and strove by numerous little attentions to atone in part for their rudeness.

A battery of lorgnettes was immediately leveled at this brilliant company, and there were numberless surmisings and questionings as to who the new-comers could be.

In a box not far from the Coolidge party there sat a royal-looking couple—an old gentleman, still hale and hearty, although upward of sixty-five, and a matron of perhaps a half-dozen years younger.

By the side of the latter, and assiduously attending to her wants, was a young man of about two-and-twenty.

It was no other than Adrian Dredmond!

He, too, had leveled his glass as the new-comers settled themselves in their places.

After one sweeping glance, he half started from his chair, with a low exclamation of pleasure.

"Whom do you see, Adrian?" asked the lady by his side.

"Some friends who came over in the same steamer with me, I believe," he replied, taking another look, and a smile of pleasure curving his fine lips as his eye rested upon Brownie, who seemed to him in her elegant robes like some beautiful vision from another sphere.

"Americans?" demanded his companion, preparing to adjust her own glass.

"Yes, your ladyship," was the quiet response.

"Ah!"

Her ladyship, as she uttered this with a slight accent of contempt, evidently did not deem them worthy the effort of a glance, and accordingly turned her glass toward the stage, the curtain having risen for the first act.

For a time the attention of all was attracted in the same direction.

Brownie sat as one entranced, forgetting the past, and living over again the exquisite delight which she had so often experienced in by-gone days.

Wilbur Coolidge, as he stood behind her, his hand resting lightly upon the back of her chair, could feel the thrill of ecstasy which crept over her as the first notes of that almost divine songstress, Mlle. Titiens, broke the breathless hush of the expectant throng.

"You are fond of the opera, Miss Douglas?" he whispered, when the curtain at length fell.

"Passionately," she replied, turning her glowing face toward

him; then added: "And, Mr. Coolidge, you have given me the first bit of unalloyed pleasure I have had since great misfortune came upon me."

Her voice quivered, her eyes were dewy, and her breast heaved with the deliciousness of the hour.

To him, as he stood looking down upon her, she was the fairest being that breathed the breath of life.

"I would I could henceforth give you every joy of earth," he murmured, tenderly, in her ear.

"Wilbur," his mother said, in cold, hard tones, "will you come and arrange your sister's cloak?"

She had watched his every movement, and her heart was in a tumult of rage at that artful girl for presuming to keep him at her side.

A meaning glance was exchanged between mother and daughter, as she made her request; and after the cloak was satisfactorily arranged, as he was about returning to his post, Isabel said:

"Sit down here, Wilbur, and point out to me some of the people whom you know."

He pointed out several, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, there is that Mr. Dredmond who came over with us, is it not?"

"Yes," dryly replied her brother.

"I like his appearance very much. I wish you would go and bring him here, and introduce him to us."

"What is the use? Any other time will do as well, and it is nearly time for the curtain to rise again," he said, impatiently, and with an uneasy glance toward Miss Douglas.

"Oh, there is plenty of time. Look! he is bowing to you now."

Wilbur returned the salutation, but did not move, and his mother exclaimed:

"Do oblige your sister, Wilbur. He is, indeed, a fine-looking young man; I wonder if he is well connected?"

"Rather. He is grandson to an earl," was the laconic reply.

"*An earl?*" ejaculated both mother and daughter in a breath.

"Yes; so I have lately learned, and, notwithstanding he will succeed to an earldom upon his grandfather's death, he is very modest about it, and prefers to be addressed as plain Mr. Dredmond, rather than 'my lord.'"

"Wilbur, you must introduce him, by all means. Isabel, who knows what may happen?" and Mrs. Coolidge, much excited at the intelligence she had just received, ruffled her feathers with motherly pride.

"There, Wilbur! I do believe he is coming here. He has left his box, and is coming this way!" exclaimed Isabel, her cheeks flushing a vivid scarlet at the thought of being introduced to a peer of the realm.

Adrian Dredmond was indeed bending his steps in that direction; but had those proud women known that it was on account of their despised governess, and her alone, they would not have been so elated.

Wilbur arose and met him at the entrance.

"How are you, Coolidge?" exclaimed the young man, heartily, and extending his hand. "We have not met often of late," he added.

"No; I have been dancing attendance upon the ladies Will you come in and be introduced?"

"With pleasure," and his eyes lingered upon that graceful figure, clad in maize-colored silk, seated between the two young girls.

Wilbur led him first to his mother and Isabel, then presented him to Viola and Alma, and finally to Brownie, in spite of Mrs. Coolidge's warning glance, as she saw what he was about to do.

The young girl's cheeks kindled to a flame as she laid her daintily-gloved hand in his, and remembered that this handsome stranger, whose name she had not known until this moment, had held her in his arms, and so close to his bosom that she had felt the beating of his great heart.

Wilbur noted her rich color, and the shy drooping of her white lids; he noted, too, the lingering look of admiration which the young man bent upon her, and a great pain smote his heart—a fear that trouble, and disaster to his hopes, would follow this introduction.

Mr. Dredmond was invited to a seat by Isabel, and instantly monopolized by her, while Mrs. Coolidge, much elated at the turn events were taking, took care that Wilbur did not resume his position near the governess, but kept him busy answering questions till the opera was over.

Miss Isabel intended that Mr. Dredmond should attend her to the carriage, but, by some means, in leaving the box, they became separated, he standing at the entrance until all had passed out.

Brownie being the last one, he offered her his arm to conduct her through the crowd.

She could not refuse without seeming rude, yet she was keen enough to perceive that the attention would call down the dire displeasure of her employer upon her head.

The fringe of her opera-cloak became entangled upon one of the seats in passing out, and while stopping to remove it, the rest of the party were borne along with the crowd, leaving them far behind.

In the lobby they encountered an old gentleman and lady. In an instant the gaze of the former became riveted upon Miss Douglas.

He stopped in her path.

His face grew ghastly white, his lips twitched nervously, and he breathed as if terribly agitated.

Brownie lifted her eyes, and was startled at his appearance. It seemed to her as if she was confronting a madman. He bent toward her until his quick breath smote her cheek. He did not seem to notice her companion, all his faculties were concentrated upon the startled girl.

He lifted his shaking hand and touched with one finger that glittering cross upon her bosom.

"There is but one cross like that in the world," he muttered. "Girl, girl, where did you get it?" he demanded, hoarsely.

Before she could collect her scattered senses to reply, before even Mr. Dredmond could interpose to save her the annoyance of replying, some one behind cried out:

"Make way, there, a lady has fainted!"

Then the crowd surged in between them; the old man was borne one way, Brownie and her companion the other, and she only caught one more glimpse of a pair of deep, fathomless eyes, filled with keenest pain, a white, set face, its lips livid and rigid.

Then she found herself in the fresh, cool air, and Adrian Dredmond saying, in tones of apology:

"You will excuse him, Miss Douglas; he is an old man."

"Certainly; but he startled me somewhat," she answered, drawing a deep breath; and before she could ask if he knew who the strange gentleman was, she found they were beside the Coolidge carriage.

"Really, Miss Douglas, is it you at last? You have kept us waiting until we are tired," exclaimed Isabel, peevishly.

She was boiling with rage that the governess had secured the escort which she had so coveted.

"I hope you have not been troubled, Mr. Dredmond," apologized Mrs. Coolidge, graciously, and giving Brownie a withering look.

"Oh, no; it has given me pleasure to attend Miss Douglas," blundered the young man, saying the very worst thing possible.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Mrs. Coolidge, but the crowd detained us, and my cloak caught upon one of the seats," explained Brownie.

"Crowd, indeed! I've seen governesses before this who liked to flirt," sneered the irate Isabel under her breath.

Both Mr. Dredmond and Miss Douglas caught the insolent words, and they aroused all the fire in the young girl's blood.

With the air of a queen, she turned, as she was about enter-

ing the carriage, and holding out her little hand, she said to Mr. Dredmond:

"Thank you, Mr. Dredmond, for your kindness, and good-night."

He bowed low over her hand, then assisting her to enter the carriage, lifted his hat to the others and turned away, but not before he had noted the menacing looks cast upon the poor little governess for her audacity.

"She's plucky, though," he said, with a smile, remembering her haughty air, as she bade him "good-night," "and they'll find their match in her."

"Miss Douglas, please step this way one moment," Mrs. Coolidge commanded, in icy tones, upon entering the house.

She led the way toward the library, Brownie following, with head erect, and a mien which even the fashionable and imposing Mrs. Coolidge could not subdue.

"I wish it distinctly understood, Miss Douglas," the matron began, with a look which would have annihilated the young girl had she possessed less of the spirit of heroes within her, "that hereafter you are to receive no attention from gentlemen while you remain in my employ. Miss Isabel's prospects are not to be interfered with by *you*."

Brownie's red lips curled with scorn.

She met her glance proudly and without the quiver of a nerve.

"Mrs. Coolidge, I have not the slightest desire to interfere in any way with Miss Coolidge's prospects. The occurrence of this evening was wholly unpremeditated as far as I am concerned. But, madam, I wish it distinctly understood upon *my* part, that

if the insults to which I have been subjected to-night are ever repeated I shall consider my connection with you at an end."

This was a new departure, surely.

Who ever knew of a governess making terms before with her employer, and in that tone and spirit?

There was nothing disrespectful or unlady-like in Miss Douglas' manner.

But there was a resolution and firmness in what she said which plainly indicated that she had no intention of being crushed or browbeaten by any human being upon the face of the earth.

Mrs. Coolidge could have strangled her as she stood there in her proud beauty, but she began to be a little afraid of her as well.

Tyrannical spirits are always cowardly.

"Really, Miss Douglas, it seems to me you are assuming a great deal for a dependent," returned the woman, haughtily.

"I recognize the fact, madam, that I *am* in a measure dependent upon your favor; but I am also aware that my services are of no small value to you. When I consented to take charge of your daughters' education, I did *not* consent to forfeit my self-respect by quietly submitting to any abuse from any member of your family."

Brownie's tone was very quiet, but very clear and firm.

"What am I to understand by this language from you, Miss Douglas?" demanded Mrs. Coolidge, nearly choking with anger.

"That I expect due consideration from yourself and family,

while I in turn render you all proper respect. I wish you good-night, madam."

With a courteous inclination of her bright head, Brownie turned and walked from the room with the air of an empress.

Mrs. Coolidge stood looking after her for several minutes in utter amazement.

Never before had a governess—and she had had many—dared to address her in this manner.

Never before had any one in her employ presumed to gainsay her in the slightest degree.

But now she recognized a spirit, albeit it was in a little body, that was superior to her own, and it cowed while it enraged her.

"Who is the little vixen, I wonder?" she ejaculated, when she had recovered her self-possession somewhat. "She is evidently far above her station; and, judging from her appearance to-night, she must have moved in society equal to any into which we are received."

Doubtless Brownie's reply to Mrs. Coolidge's query would have been:

"Madam, I am a Douglas!"

But that lady knew, as the young girl had said, that she was invaluable to her.

Already her younger daughters were acquiring a fluency of speech and an elegance of manner which delighted her, and she felt that it would not do to part with her cultivated governess for any light consideration.

She knew it would be very difficult to find any one, while they were abroad, who would prove as useful in every respect

as Miss Douglas, and she resolved to swallow her wrath, and keep her at all hazards, unless *Wilbur should fall in love with her.*

At all events, one thing was settled—Miss Douglas should be seen no more in company.

CHAPTER XV.

ISABEL'S DISCOVERY.

A few days subsequent to Brownie's interview with Mrs. Coolidge, after a wearisome day in the school-room, the young ladies having been very dull and listless, Brownie donned her hat and jacket, and went out for a stroll by herself.

She had been very brave and defiant while confronting Mrs. Coolidge, but the reaction followed immediately, and she had been sad and disspirited ever since.

She felt so alone in the world—so weary of this loveless life.

It was evident that she was looked upon as a mere machine, fit only to make herself obliging and useful.

To be sure, there had been no more unkind or insolent speeches, for Isabel had been warned by her mother that Miss Douglas was so extremely high-spirited that she would not submit to them; but their manner to her was so arrogant and overbearing that it was absolutely painful to be in their presence.

She was thinking of it to-day as she went out, and try as she would to rise above it, to feel that it was beneath her to notice anything so low and ignoble, yet it did sting with a keenness which was very hard to bear.

She almost began to long for the old days in the straw factory, and the independence of being her own mistress again,

even though she was obliged to live less luxuriously and work more laboriously.

She walked briskly on for a mile or two, past elegant residences, modern villas, and ancient halls, wholly unconscious of the more direful calamity which would befall her upon her return—of the fearful cloud about to burst above her head.

* * * * * * *

Isabel Coolidge had, so to speak, been dying of envy ever since the night of their attendance at the opera.

Brownie's appearance upon that occasion had been like "a worm in the bud," gnawing at her heart-strings continually.

How did Miss Douglas happen to have such elegant apparel? Where did she get such wonderful jewels?

She did not believe her mother's theory that she had been suddenly reduced from prosperity to poverty.

Brownie's manners were too simple and unassuming for her to believe that she had ever been a "fine lady."

She kept revolving the matter over and over in her mind.

The beautiful dress that she had worn, heavy with its own richness, the costly lace, those wonderful jewels, the frost-like handkerchief, and the lovely fan, were all alike a marvel to her greedy eyes.

She longed to know if she possessed more like them.

She could not conceive how a poor girl, who had been forced first to go into a straw factory to earn her daily bread, then to become a governess, could be the possessor of such elegant and expensive articles of dress.

"There is some mystery about it, mamma, which I cannot understand," she said, when speaking of it to Mrs. Coolidge.

"My dear, I tell you she must have belonged to some wealthy family who suddenly lost their property; such things happen every day."

"But if that is the case she could easily have sold her beautiful things—those jewels alone would have brought a handsome sum, upon which she could have lived a long time."

"Perhaps they are heir-looms, and she does not like to part with them."

"Heir-looms? Pshaw! what can a poor girl want with heir-looms? It seems to me that bread and butter would be the first point demanding consideration."

"Well, at all events, it did not seem to be with her, as far as sacrificing her jewels goes," returned Mrs. Coolidge.

"Mamma, I tell you I don't believe the girl came by them honestly," Isabel said, impressively, after a few moments of deep thought.

"Why, child, you do not mean to say that you believe the girl is a thief?" exclaimed her mother, aghast.

"It is an ugly word, I know, but you said yourself that you considered her artful."

"Yes, I think she is about attracting the attention of gentlemen; although, with her drooping eyes and unconscious manner, one less versed in the ways of the world would say she was the impersonation of modesty."

"I hate such prudish airs, and I do not think there will be any harm in watching her."

Miss Isabel had registered a mental vow that *she* should watch the despised governess, and that *no* means would be illegitimate

which would reveal her past history, or bring to light anything to prove her unworthy the place she occupied.

Since Adrian Dredmond's evident attraction toward her on the night of the opera, she had resolved that Brownie Douglas and she should not live long in the same house.

With these thoughts continually in her mind, she had kept up a constant espionage upon the governess' actions, and to-day, when she saw her leave the house, equipped for a long walk, she concluded that the right time had come to carry out certain plans which she had formed.

Watching her opportunity, when no one was about, she slipped quietly into Miss Douglas' room, and locked the door after her.

She had never deigned to enter there before, and she was now surprised to find how tastefully everything was arranged.

She noticed the few choice pictures upon the walls, and here and there an exquisite little statuette or article of bronze—those relics of Brownie's beautiful home in Philadelphia, which she dearly loved.

She went to her dressing-case, and was surprised at the elegance of her toilet appurtenances. *She* had none so rich!

One little thing in particular struck her.

It was an exquisite case of Russia leather, with the initials "E. H." engraven in gilt upon its handle.

She opened it, and an exclamation of delight escaped her.

Within were six tiny flasks of cut glass, with gold stoppers, filled with choicest perfumes, upon each of which the same letters were cut.

"Ah, ha! 'E. H.,' that does not stand for Mehetabel Douglas!" she said, with a sinister smile.

She took them out, one by one, removing their gold stoppers and inhaling the delicious perfume with which they were filled.

Suddenly her attention was attracted by a folded paper in the bottom of the case.

She took it up, opened it, and read, in a gentleman's handwriting:

"My Darling:—To-morrow will be our wedding-day. I cannot come to you to-day, as I promised, but I send my little gift to help grace your table. I pray Heaven that the fragrance which this little case contains may be but the emblem of your future life with me. Ever thine, William."

Could it be that Miss Douglas had been rich, and about to be married, and then disappointed?

There was no date, and no name but that of William, to give the prying girl any clew as to the author of the note.

No, this could have been no wedding-gift intended for her, or the initials would have been different.

She replaced the note, also the bottles, and then turned her attention to other things, but becoming more and more convinced of Brownie's dishonesty.

She opened the bureau drawers, and was surprised to find several other articles marked with the same initials.

Two or three sets of undergarments, trimmed with costly laces and embroideries, a couple of handkerchiefs, which made her eyes water to look at them, an emerald ring, and a pearl pin.

She found Brownie's jewel-box, containing only a few plain articles of jewelry, and one or two sets of jet, which she had purchased since her aunt's death, and the cuff-button, the mate to which was in Adrian Dredmond's possession.

But the jeweled cross and hair ornament were not to be found there.

"I wonder where she keeps them?" Miss Coolidge soliloquized, as, after examining all the drawers, she turned her gaze about the room.

Her eye fell upon a large writing-desk, which stood upon a table at the further side of the room.

She went over to it, and tried to raise the lid.

It was locked, and the key removed.

"Bother!" was her impatient and inelegant exclamation.

She then began to search for the key, feeling sure that the jewels were within the writing-desk.

Now, Brownie had not a thought that any one would be guilty of such meanness as to overhaul her property during her absence, and scarcely ever kept anything locked, excepting her writing-desk.

No one had access to her room except Mary, the chamber-maid, and she had the utmost confidence in her, for, having treated the girl with great kindness, she was deeply attached to her, and was constantly affirming that "Miss Douglas were more of a rale leddy than them who purtended to be her betters."

Brownie's keys, which were held together in a bunch by a steel ring, now hung by one of their number in the trunk from

which she had taken her evening dress on the night of the opera.

On her return, she had first removed her jewels and returned them to their casket, then replaced her dress in the trunk, just turning the key, and leaving it in the lock.

Isabel's quick eye soon caught sight of them, and, with a cry of pleasure, she darted across the room to secure them, then returned to the desk, and finally succeeded in fitting the right key in its lock.

The desk, in itself, was nothing remarkable, for it had seen long usage, but its contents were rare and lovely.

A golden penholder and pen lay within; also an elaborate paper-knife of the same metal; a silver paper-weight of exquisite workmanship and design; a seal of onyx, in which blazed a huge ruby; besides several other things; and all these were marked with the same initials, "E. H."

Isabel lifted the inner lid, and, behold! the casket of ebony, inlaid with pearl, which Miss Mehetabel had given Brownie on that last day of her life, was within.

There were also several packages of letters and papers, but to these she paid no heed.

"I have found them," she cried, and was about to seize the casket, when she caught the sound of a footstep outside the door.

Her heart stood still with fear, and cold chills crept down her back.

She had not dreamed that Miss Douglas would return so soon, for she had heard her tell Alma she would be gone for an hour or more.

She would not be caught in this contemptible act for all the jewels in the queen's crown, and she began to look about for some way of escape.

A hand was laid upon the door-knob, and it turned. A moment's silence, and it was tried again—this time with more force.

Then a voice called:

"Miss Douglas, please, may I come in a moment?"

It was Viola's; and Isabel grew faint with a sense of relief, but she stood silent, scarcely daring to breathe, lest she should be heard, and her sister insist upon coming in.

Presently she heard Alma call out:

"Viola, Miss Douglas is not there; she has gone out for a walk."

Then the steps moved away, and the guilty girl was obliged to sit down to gather strength, before she could continue her investigations. Cowardice and guilt are inseparable.

She dare not wait long, however, and soon turned her attention to the ebony casket again.

Fortunately for her, the little golden key, with its curious chain attached, was in the lock.

Brownie had forgotten to clasp it about her neck again after replacing the jewels.

As she was about turning the key she hesitated, while a feeling of her own meanness stole over her.

"If I didn't mistrust the girl, I wouldn't do it," she apologized to herself. Then she added: "If she is not what she pretends, of course it is better for us to know it before the girls

become contaminated; but if I do not discover anything, why, then it is all right."

With this bit of doubtful sophistry in her mind, she turned the key and lifted the lid.

The sight which greeted her dazzled her, even as it had Brownie when she had first looked upon those treasures.

There lay the coral cross and the butterfly hair ornament, for which she had been seeking, but she almost lost sight of them while gazing upon those others, of tenfold more value and beauty.

"Now I *know* she is a thief!" murmured the astonished girl, when she had somewhat recovered from her surprise. "It is not possible," she added, "that any girl of *her* age, outside of royalty itself, could ever be the rightful possessessor of such magnificence as this. Why, there is a fortune here," she went on; "and no one need tell *me* that a girl would choose to work for her daily bread when she has the means of living in luxury in her possession. But no, it is evident that she has stolen them, and does not dare to sell them for fear of detection. Yes, and she must have stolen all those other things marked 'E. H.' What a creature we have been harboring! I imagine Wilbur and Mr. Dredmond will not think her quite so charming when they come to know that her dainty hands have been guilty of kleptomania. How exquisite," she said, bending over them and touching the precious stones with her white fingers. "This diamond necklace is fit for a princess. It is like some fairy story, or like a vision from Aladdin's palace. But what shall I do about them?" she asked, after she had inspected them all. "If she has stolen them, as I do not doubt

she has, they certainly ought not to be left in her possession. I will take them to mamma, and ask her what shall be done with them."

With this decision arrived at, Isabel closed the lid of the casket, remarking its beautiful inlaid cover as she did so; then, removing it from the desk, she shut and locked that, and restored the keys to the trunk where she had found them. Then she sped swiftly to her mother's boudoir, devoutly hoping that Brownie would not return until she had displayed her treasures to her, made her explanation, and they could decide what was best to be done about the matter.

If the truth had been known, the meddlesome girl had a secret longing to possess those jewels herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

Mrs. Coolidge looked up with a frown, as Isabel entered the room.

"Where have you been so long?" she asked. "I have wanted you to arrange about your dress for Lady Peasewell's drawing-room next week."

"Don't scold, mamma; I have had an adventure, and I will tell you all about it as soon as I can get my breath," said Isabel, sinking upon a sofa, breathless, from her haste to reach her mother's apartments.

"What have you there?" demanded Mrs. Coolidge, as she caught sight of the casket which her daughter carried.

"You remember, mamma, what I said about Miss Douglas being the possessor of such elegant jewels?" she said, not heeding the question.

"Yes; you said you did not believe she came by them honestly. Why?"

"I am sure of it now. Look here!"

She suddenly threw back the lid of the casket, and placed it in her mother's lap.

"Merciful heavens, child! Where did you get these? Ah!" she continued, as Isabel did not reply, "here are the very ornaments which Miss Douglas wore the other evening."

She looked up at her daughter, and the two read each other's faces in silence for a moment.

"You do not mean to tell me that you found all these in her possession?" she at length asked, in a low tone.

"I do, mamma," Isabel said, impressively.

"But how did you happen to discover them? Surely, my daughter, you have not been guilty of prying into her things during her absence," said Mrs. Coolidge, gravely.

Isabel colored violently.

"I have, mamma. I should think it was time some one investigated matters, when we have a *governess* in the house possessing *such* treasures. I believed her guilty of theft, and I was determined that the girls should not remain under her influence if anything could be proved against her. So I set myself to work; and I think when you have examined the contents of that box, and hear what I have to tell you, that you will conclude that she is no fit instructress for *your* daughters."

"Isabel, I am afraid you have done a very unwise thing," remarked her mother, thoughtfully, with her eyes still fixed upon the jewels.

"How so?"

"We cannot *prove* that she stole a single article in her possession."

"Why, she has quantities of beautiful things, marked with the initials E. H."

And Isabel explained about the case of golden-stoppered perfumery flasks, and the contents of the writing-desk; also about the note.

"If she is light-fingered, you don't want her here; she'll be

adding to her stock by appropriating our treasures," concluded the heartless girl.

"No; if she is that kind of a person, she ought not to be allowed to remain."

"Well, do you believe that any girl in her circumstances could be the honest possessor of that fortune?" Isabel asked, pointing toward the gleaming jewels.

"N-o, I'm afraid not. Yet I dislike, of all things, that you should have got them in the way you have."

Mrs. Coolidge took up the diamond necklace, and it sparkled in her hands like huge drops of dew in the sun.

"Very well; I will replace them at once, mamma, if you think best, and we will say no more about it," replied her daughter, cunningly.

She had noticed the avaricious gleam in her mother's eyes as they contemplated their beauty, and she knew she would give as much to possess them as she would herself.

"That would never do, my daughter. I should not rest easy while there is a suspicion against Miss Douglas' honesty in my heart. There is only one thing to be done now."

"What is that?"

"We must demand an explanation of her immediately upon her return."

"Of course, she has a trumped-up story of some kind; she is too artful not to be prepared for us."

"She will have to *prove* her property, my dear At all events, I shall advise her to dispose of them in some way. It is not proper for a governess to have such valuables."

"Perhaps she would sell them to us, mamma," said Isabel,

a greedy look in her eyes. "That tiara would be vastly becoming to me."

"They are the most exquisite jewels I have ever seen in my life, and the settings are peculiar. But what is there underneath? Have you looked, Isabel?" Mrs. Coolidge asked, finding the velvet bed was movable.

"No; I was so startled at finding such an array that I did not stop to make any further investigations, but brought them directly to you."

Mrs. Coolidge lifted the velvet bed

"What have we here?" she exclaimed, as she saw the enameled locket studded with diamonds.

With breathless curiosity she touched the spring, and it flew open, revealing the noble face of Lord Dunforth.

"Who can it be, mamma?" asked Isabel, with wonder-wide eyes.

"I do not know; no one who belongs to Miss Douglas, I fancy, from his looks. How strangely he is dressed—like some court gentleman."

"And what is this?" said Isabel, taking up the card that lay beneath. Then she cried out: "Why, mamma, it is a dancing list, and look! here are the names of counts and lords! Do you believe now that Miss Douglas ever came by these things honestly?" she demanded, in tones of triumph.

"No, Isabel, I do not," returned her mother, with firm-set lips; "and I shall inquire into it immediately on her return."

"What could a young girl eighteen years old—a poor girl without a penny, too, and who had never been out of her own country before, know of lords and counts?"

The idea was absurd.

There was a mystery about the whole thing, a tantalizing mystery, which both women were eager to solve.

Evidently Miss Douglas had seen better days, they reasoned, or she could never have received the excellent education she possessed; but then any enterprising person in moderate circumstances could acquire that under the training of the first-class schools which are found in most of the larger cities of the United States.

While these thoughts were passing through the mind of Mrs. Coolidge, she heard the hall door open and close, and Brownie's voice in cheerful conversation with Wilbur.

He had joined her by accident (?) while she was walking, and had made himself so entertaining and agreeable that the clouds upon her face had all been driven away.

She tripped gayly up stairs, wholly unconscious of the thunderbolt awaiting her.

Isabel confronted her as she reached the top stairs.

"Mamma would like to see you in her dressing-room immediately, Miss Douglas," she said, haughtily.

She colored at the tone and manner, but, wholly unconscious of any coming evil, she obeyed the summons as soon as she had removed her hat and jacket.

She found Mrs. Coolidge sitting cold and dignified in her arm-chair.

"Be seated, Miss Douglas," she said, solemnly. "I wish to speak to you upon a matter of importance."

Brownie sat down, her clear eyes wide with wonder at her reception.

There was a moment's awkward silence, the lady of the house hardly knowing how to commence.

"Ahem!" she began, shifting her glance from the clear, innocent eyes, which she had thought must have fallen before her accusing look. "Ahem! Miss Douglas, I have sent for you to ask what may seem a strange question; nevertheless, I feel it to be a *duty* to myself and family to ask it."

Brownie's fair face began to change color again.

Mrs. Coolidge noticed it, and her assurance was restored.

"I, of course, expect you will give me a straightforward reply," she added, impressively.

The shining brown head was lifted a trifle, her delicate nostrils dilated, while an unwonted spark lighted those beautiful eyes, which never for a moment left the matron's face.

She requested to give a straightforward answer!

When had she ever done otherwise?

"I wish to ask you, Miss Douglas," Mrs. Coolidge said, coming to the point at once, and feeling very uncomfortable beneath her look, "if you have anything in your possession which does not honestly belong to you?"

She now fixed her stern gaze full upon the beautiful face. The battle was begun, and she was prepared to fight it out.

For an instant all three—for Isabel had returned to the room, and now stood behind her mother's chair, where she could watch her rival—could distinctly hear the ticking of Mrs. Coolidge's watch, which lay upon the dressing-table at her side.

Then Brownie arose, and stood like an insulted princess before her inquisitor.

"Madam, I ask—nay, I *demand*—to know why you put such a question to me!" she said, in low, firm tones.

Her face had grown white as the narrow linen collar which she wore, and her eyes burned dangerously.

"You forget yourself, Miss Douglas," Mrs. Coolidge said, pompously. "It was I who asked *you* a question."

"And I consider such a question an insult, madam!"

"Very well; I expected you would; all people who are guilty of wrong feel insulted, or appear to, when they are accused."

"Guilty of wrong! accused! I do not understand you, madam. Of what do you accuse me?" demanded the young girl, with a proud dignity which her employer had not expected from her.

She began to feel a little shaky, but she was in for it now, and must go on.

"I accuse you of having stolen costly articles and appropriating them to your own use," she said, solemnly.

"Explain yourself, if you please, Mrs. Coolidge."

Those brown eyes were almost black now, but her answer was intensely quiet, and the lovely face like a snow-flake.

"Allow me to ask you one question before I explain."

"Certainly."

"How came you by those beautiful jewels, those very costly ornaments, which you wore to the opera last Wednesday evening?"

"They were given to me, madam."

"By whom?"

"By a very dear friend."

There was a quiver in the sweet voice, a trembling of the scarlet lips, but the lovely eyes were bright and tearless.

"How long have they been in your possession?" continued Mrs. Coolidge.

"A little over three months, madam."

"Mamma, mamma, does not that prove enough?" burst out Isabel, triumphantly. "Why, she has been with *us* over two months, and she worked in the factory three weeks. Who would give a *poor* girl such jewels as those?"

Brownie's only reply to this outburst was a look of ineffable scorn, and the elder lady went on in a severe tone:

"I fear, Miss Douglas, that your story is against you. When you sought employment from my husband you were in such circumstances that you were *obliged* to toil for your daily bread."

A proud inclination of her head was all the reply to this query. She dare not trust her voice just then.

"And you say these jewels were given to you about that time?"

Another bow.

"The rich clothing, and other trifles which you have, were they given to you also?"

"*Yes, madam!*"

"And all by this *same dear friend?*"

A peculiar look accompanied this question, while Isabel's eyes gleamed in wicked triumph.

She could see whither these questions were tending, if innocent Brownie did not.

"They were," she said.

"Was this friend a *gentleman*, Miss Douglas?"

For one moment there came into the young girl's lovely eyes a look of perplexity and astonishment, followed by one of blank horror.

Then all the royal blood in her Douglas' veins sprang to arms!

The rich color surged up from her enraged heart over her neck and face; up, up, as the full force of this horrible thought nearly drove her mad, until it lost itself among the bands of shining hair, and tingled to her finger tips. Then it all receded, leaving her colorless as marble, and, in her proud indignation, like some avenging spirit.

"Mrs. Coolidge," she said, in the same quiet, lady-like tones, but they made the woman shiver notwithstanding, "your language and insinuation is the grossest insult to me, and again I demand an immediate explanation."

"Isabel, bring me that box," said Mrs. Coolidge, pointing to Brownie's casket, which stood upon the table behind her.

Miss Coolidge obeyed, and Brownie uttered a cry of astonishment as she saw it.

"How came you by that? Where did you get it?" she said, starting forward, her lips quivering, and a choking sensation in her throat.

Her dear, precious casket, still sacred from the last fond touches of Miss Mehetabel's hand, profaned by their ruthless handling!

It was almost more than her tender heart could bear. She scarcely ever looked upon it without weeping, for it recalled so vividly that last happy day with her aunt.

But all this emotion was but an evidence of guilt in the eyes of those hard-hearted women.

"Is not that guilt, mamma, if you ever saw it?" whispered Isabel in her mother's ear.

She nodded her head sternly, and then turned to face her victim again.

"I will explain, Miss Douglas. The jewels which you wore to the opera are in this box with others of much greater value. Were these others given to you?"

"They were."

"At the same time?"

"At the same time, Mrs. Coolidge."

"By whom?"

"I decline to answer that question, madam," came defiantly from the young girl's compressed lips.

She had been insulted, abused; she would bear nothing more from them.

They—these evil-minded, jealous women—had gone to her room like thieves and hunted among her possessions to satisfy their low-born curiosity, and having found something which they could not clearly understand, they were determined to make use of it to crush her.

Should they crush her?

No!

She knew it would be of no use to try to prove to them that those jewels were her own. They would not believe her word, and she had not a friend in that strange land who could stand by her, to protect her against their hatred and envy.

But she would defy them to the last.

She would not submit longer to stand before them like some victim of the inquisition, and answer their insulting questions.

Mrs. Coolidge could scarcely restrain her anger at Brownie's defiance. She was very curious to know the history of those jewels, that attractive picture, and that dancing card with its high-sounding names.

"Am I to understand that you refuse to clear yourself from the suspicion which rests upon you?" she asked, growing white with anger.

"Madam, I question your right to arraign me before you in this manner, as I also question your right to enter my room in my absence, pry into my affairs, and abstract from under lock and key things which belong to me."

"Whose picture is this?" demanded Mrs. Coolidge, taking up the jeweled locket and looking again upon that noble face.

She ignored entirely Brownie's indignant protest, although she colored deeply, for she knew that if Miss Douglas owned that box with its contents she and Isabel were the thieves.

"I decline answering," said Brownie, firmly.

She could hardly refrain from crying out with pain to see those sacred relics of a lost love and a shattered life thus profaned by their rude handling.

"Beware, Miss Douglas; this defiance goes against you, and I fear will be your ruin if you persist in it," said the woman, majestically; then she added, feeling that she needed to make some explanation: "You see that it is something very unusual for a poor person like you to have such rich apparel and jewelry in her possession. We invite you to go to the opera. We do

not wish you to wear black, and ask you to wear some other color. You appear more elegantly clad than any member of my family, and you tell Viola that it is the *simplest* dress you have. Now, what are we to think? Would not any mother having daughters desire to investigate the matter? You say these things were all given to you at the same time and by the same person, and only three months ago. Can you not see how very improbable such a statement appears, when we know that you have been toiling for your daily bread nearly the whole of that time? It would have taken a small fortune," she went on, after an impressive pause, "from any one, to buy all these precious stones at one time, and young girls like you are not in the habit of receiving so much at once. Why, Isabel thinks herself fortunate to get one piece of diamond jewelry at a time. Besides all this, I find here a card with the names of counts and lords upon it. We do not have counts and lords in America; you have never been abroad before, consequently I know you have never had any acquaintance with persons of such high degree. Here is also a glove marked six and a half—I happen to know that you wear a six."

This was said with a frowning look at the little white hands, which were folded in a clasp of pain, and hanging against the folds of her sable dress.

"You refuse also to give me the name of the young man in the locket. Now, *I* can account for all this in two ways only."

Mrs. Coolidge, as she made this statement, bent her stern gaze upon the pale face and downcast eyes of the haughty girl before her, and thought she could see guilt in every feature. She thought she had very cleverly argued the matter, and

paused a moment, well satisfied with herself, before clinching her point.

"And those are," she continued, in a hard, unfeeling voice, *"you have either stolen them from some wealthy families with whom you have served, or——"*

"MADAM!"

The downcast eyes were raised now, and the fire which flashed from them seemed almost to sear the heartless woman's face.

"I dare say, mamma, she was waiting-maid in some rich family, and came by them in that way," put in Isabel, spitefully.

"Do not interrupt me, Isabel. Miss Douglas, please wait until I finish before you make any remarks," Mrs. Coolidge said, coldly, with a wave of her hand; then continued: "As I was saying, I think you either stole them, or *you have had relations with some person which would debar you from ever entering any respectable family, though I cannot conceive how any one could be such a fool as to lavish so much upon a——"*

"CEASE!" came in a hoarse whisper from Brownie's lovely lips, which had grown of the color of ashes, and were quivering with insulted pride and anger, while her heart stood still with horror.

The word checked Mrs. Coolidge in spite of her insolent self-assurance, and, bad as her language had been, she was ever after glad that she had not uttered that last maddening word.

To be accused of theft had been almost more than Brownie could bear.

A *Douglas* accused of *stealing!*

But the other insinuation! She had hardly been able to comprehend it at first.

She grew sick at heart, dizzy and faint, when the woman's meaning at length burst upon and nearly crushed her.

For one moment her blood seemed turned to ice, and her brain to fire.

The next, conscious virtue asserted itself.

The proud figure grew more proudly erect, the little head was lifted with a haughty grace, and Queen Margaret Tudor herself, of whom Miss Mehetabel had been wont to boast, would have gloried in the majesty of her appearance.

Then the pained, almost convulsed expression about her delicate mouth relaxed into a withering smile of scorn.

What were these two base spirits, that *she*, a Douglas, with royal blood in her veins, should fear them?

Yet the struggle for mastery was severe, and there was an awkward silence of several minutes before she could trust herself to speak.

She turned her blazing eyes full upon her accusers, and she found they could not bear the glance; their eyes dropped guiltily beneath it.

Then, with that mighty calmness in her tones and manner, Brownie said to Mrs. Coolidge:

"Have you anything further to say to me regarding those jewels, madam?"

"Not unless I can persuade you to confess and make restitution," she answered, uneasily.

"I have no confession to make; I have no restitution to make. Those articles of jewelry are legally mine—how. I do

not intend to explain to you, either now or at any other time. The manner in which you or your daughter became possessed of them does you infinite credit; it is an act of which doubtless you will be proud all your life. Now, if you please, I will relieve you of them; and from this moment consider my engagement with you at an end, as, after such repeated insults, I could no longer remain in your family."

She reached forth her hand to take the casket. but Mrs. Coolidge clutched it with the grip of a miser.

"Oh, no, Miss Douglas, you cannot have this again; you have not yet *proved* to me that it is yours, and I cannot allow such a valuable possession to go out of my hands until I am assured who the rightful owner is."

She sneered, white with anger, that the girl should dare brave her so.

"You can put on as many grand airs as you choose, miss, but you'll find that we know how to take them for just what they are worth," said Isabel, scoffingly.

"Mrs. Coolidge, that box and all its contents are *mine*, and I demand that you yield it up to me," Brownie said, sternly, fully aroused.

"Hear the minx, mamma; do dismiss her instantly," cried Isabel, angrily.

"You cannot have them, Miss Douglas, until you *prove* that they are yours," returned Mrs. Coolidge, firmly, and she closed the box with a snap.

"Then I shall be obliged to take legal measures to obtain them," returned the young girl, with decision.

"Ha, ha! hear her, mamma. She speaks like a princess,

and she says she shall consider her engagement with you at an end, as if that were a matter she only can decide," cried Isabel, actually quivering with rage.

Brownie noticed her by neither word nor look.

Addressing Mrs. Coolidge again very gently, she said:

"Once more, madam, will you give up my property?"

She spoke so imperatively that for a moment the woman was staggered, and began to think she had better yield the point, for, if the girl should call in official aid, it might make things very awkward and unpleasant.

Isabel saw her mother's indecision, and, stooping, she whispered in her ear:

'Don't you do it, mamma; wait until papa comes, at least."

"You prize them very highly?" Mrs. Coolidge asked, after a moment's thought.

"I do."

"They are not suitable for you to wear in your position; you are poor—could you be persuaded to part with them for a consideration?"

A sudden idea had come to her that if she could persuade the governess to sell them, they would hush the matter up among themselves.

She was greedy for the jewels, and was determined that they should not go out of her hands if she could help it.

"What do you mean by 'a consideration,' madam?" asked Miss Douglas, in a peculiar tone.

"Why, if I should pay you something handsome for them, and pledge myself to say nothing more about the matter, would you give them up?"

"Really, Mrs. Coolidge, you are very discriminating in your ideas of honesty. You assert that *I* have stolen these things. Would *you* be willing to purchase stolen property?"

The woman's face grew crimson with rage at this shaft.

"You can leave the room, Miss Douglas, your insolence is insufferable," she cried, rising and pointing with her shaking finger to the door.

"You understand me, madam; I shall take the law, unless you give me my property," returned the young girl, calmly confronting her, and taking no notice of her command.

"*Take* the law, then; you'll have a fight of it, if you do, let me tell you, for no one will believe the tale of a governess, who has been dismissed for unworthy conduct. Now, go!" cried the irate woman, almost beside herself with passion.

Brownie uttered no words, but walked like a queen from the room; but once within her own, she broke down utterly.

To lose those treasures, which had been the silent companions of her heart-broken aunt during all those lonely years, and around which clustered so much of hope and despair, was more than she could bear.

The little chain, too, with its golden key, which her aunt had told her to wear as long as she lived, that, too, was in the power of those cruel women.

She grew nearly wild over the thought of her loss.

She *must* have them again—she *would* have them, but *how* to get them was the question.

She realized all the difficulties which lay in her path.

She was a stranger in this foreign land, without a friend outside the family to whom to turn in her hour of need.

If she should take the law, as she had threatened, no one would believe the story, as Mrs. Coolidge had said.

Only Isabel and her mother knew anything of what had just transpired, and if they should deny her statement, how could she help herself, and who, indeed, would believe that a poor governess owned such valuables?

The more she thought the more hopeless her case seemed to become.

Once her thoughts turned involuntarily to Adrian Dredmond; perhaps he would help her.

But her maidenly delicacy recoiled from seeking aid from him, a stranger, and besides——

Besides what?

She could not tell!

And what was her future to be? Where should she go? What should she do?

Leave her present situation she must!

She could not forfeit her self-respect by remaining where she had been so insulted and abused, although she was becoming very much attached to the young girls, Viola and Alma.

She, of course, could not get another situation as governess without a recommendation, for, without doubt, Mrs. Coolidge would refuse to give her one, and she *would not accept it if she did.*

Take her recommendation! Never!

CHAPTER XVII.

DECLARATION OF LOVE.

While Brownie was weeping out her misery alone, and trying to plan what was best for the future, Isabel Coolidge and her mother were examining, more at their leisure, the beautiful ornaments, which had so excited their admiration and astonishment and which they both began now to covet.

Isabel tried the effect of each separate piece upon herself.

To do the two women justice, they really believed that the jewels had been stolen.

Whether Brownie herself had been guilty of the theft, or whether some one else had taken them, and then presented them to her, Mrs. Coolidge could not determine.

At all events, she was determined that they should not go out of her hands until their ownership was fully proved; and, that failing, why then they might as well become her property as any one's. Besides, they were much more suitable for her than for a poor governess, who could have no possible use for them. And thus she tried to stifle the qualms of conscience.

"Mamma, this tiara of opals, pearls, and diamonds will be just the thing for me to wear next Wednesday night at Lady Peasewell's; see how becoming it is." And Isabel turned from the mirror, where she had been catering to her vanity for the last half hour.

"It is lovely, my dear; but I doubt whether your father will be willing you should wear it. His ideas are peculiar, you know."

"He won't be here, mamma. You know he said he should not be home for a week or ten days; so he need not know anything about it."

"I am at a loss to know whether it is best to tell him anything about this affair," said Mrs. Coolidge, musingly.

"But what excuse will you give him for bouncing Miss Douglas?" asked Isabel, who had a taste for using slang once in a while.

"Her insolence to me ought to be a sufficient reason, I think," her mother answered, flushing as she recalled the governess' keen shafts and haughty manner.

"No one knows anything of the matter but you and I; why not keep still about it?" urged Isabel, eagerly.

"My only fear is, that she will take the law, as she threatened, and then your father would have to know about it. Besides, he will be very angry at the way we gained possession of them, and then there will be no end of trouble."

She very well knew that if that day's doings became known to her honorable husband he would insist upon her returning the casket to Miss Douglas, and tell her that she was meddling with what was none of her business.

She began to fear that she had been rash in pursuing the course she had, and she heartily wished that Isabel had kept her meddlesome fingers at home. And yet, every time her eyes rested upon the glittering wealth with which her daughter was toying, the desire to possess them became stronger.

"Pshaw!" returned Isabel, "she'll never dare take the law, and, if she does, who will believe her, *providing the jewels cannot be found, and we are very much astonished and indignant at being accused of taking them from her!*"

The two women gazed at each other in silence for a moment.

"Isabel, you would not dare do such a thing—it would be stealing and lying," said her mother, in a whisper.

"Oh, no, mamma; you are too conscientious altogether," returned the girl, shrugging her shoulders, and trying on Miss Mehetabel's beautiful engagement ring at the same time. "We both agree," she went on, "that they have already been stolen, and we only take possession of them for a little while, until we can find the *true* owner. I'm sure I would give them up at once if we could find the person whom they belong to. Of course, if we should acknowledge that we have them in our possession we should have to give them up, and, whether Miss Douglas proved her property or not, *we* should lose them. At any rate, let us hold on to them, and wait a while to see what she will do."

"I am afraid it will not do for you to wear them, Isabel; you may meet the very person to whom they belong, here in London."

"So much the better, then, mamma; we shall know that we did right in taking them from Miss Douglas, and can make our explanations and restore them. It strikes me that my suggestion is a very wise one, after all," concluded the artful girl, who was determined to keep the jewels.

"You may be right, but I don't feel exactly easy about the matter; above all things, don't let Wilbur know anything about

it," returned Mrs. Coolidge, fearing more and more that there might be trouble ahead for them.

"No, indeed, mother, and, as I began this business, I'll take charge of these jewels, and *you need know nothing about them*, if your conscience is troubling you."

Isabel replaced the jewels in the casket, shut it, and, with a laugh, started for her own room.

As she opened the door, which had stood ajar ever since Brownie went out, she encountered Wilbur face to face.

She would rather have faced an alligator at that moment.

"What is it you don't wish Wilbur to know, and what jewels are you talking about?" he smilingly demanded, as he barred her passage.

He had come up just in time to hear their last remarks.

"That is my secret," she replied, trying to turn the matter off playfully, though her heart was beating like a trip-hammer.

"Are they in that box? let me see."

Before she hardly knew what he was about, he had taken it from her and opened it.

"Where did you get these?" he asked, in great surprise.

"They are borrowed," Isabel replied, giving her mother a significant look.

"Borrowed! who could lend such a valuable collection as this?" he asked, beginning to feel, from their appearance, that all was not right.

"Ah!" he added, with a start, after he had examined them more carefully, "here are those ornaments which Miss Douglas wore the other evening. Do the others belong to her, too?"

They saw that it would be useless to try to keep their secret

from him, and little by little he drew it all from their reluctant lips. A more indignant mortal never trod the earth than Wilbur Coolidge when he got at the truth of the matter.

He demanded that the jewels be returned at once to Miss Douglas, and a suitable apology made for their insulting treatment of her.

An angry scene ensued, which Mrs. Coolidge finally put an end to by coming forward, taking the casket from her son's hand, and locking it within her husband's safe, which stood in the room.

"Now, Wilbur, be so kind as to hold your tongue," she said, angrily, "you have made a fool of yourself with this girl. I intend to keep these things until your father returns, and see if *he* believes a poor governess came by these things lawfully."

"You women are regular tyrants, and I reckon when father does return there will be a different state of things," he replied, with flashing eyes.

"Oblige me by dropping the subject, my son; you are interfering in what does not concern you in the least," returned Mrs. Coolidge, coldly.

"I shall *make* it my business, madam, mother mine, just as soon as the law will allow, if the poor abused darling will let me," he muttered, as he angrily left the room.

He watched for Brownie to come down all the evening, but she remained in her own room, too utterly miserable to desire to meet any one.

Viola and Alma inquired for her at tea time, but were told that she was indisposed, and would not come down.

Viola afterward stole up stairs with a cup of tea and a tempt

ing plate of cold chicken and toast, but Miss Douglas' door was locked, and she could not gain admittance, so she was forced to take it back again to the dining-room.

The next morning Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel started off on a shopping expedition, and as the carriage drove from the door, Wilbur rang the library bell, and desired the servant who appeared to ask Miss Douglas to grant him a few moments' conversation. The young man was pale and excited, and after the servant disappeared, he walked the floor nervously.

Brownie soon came down, looking haggard and wan, her usually bright eyes heavy and lusterless, and great dark circles underneath them.

Wilbur hastened forward to meet her as she opened the door.

"My dear Miss Douglas," he said, flushing deeply, "I do not know what to say to you, but I am more indignant than I can express at the treatment you received yesterday."

Brownie smiled wearily, though her lips quivered at his kindly words. It was so comforting to be treated civilly.

"Can I do anything for you, Miss Douglas?" Wilbur asked, eagerly, his heart deeply touched by her sorrowful appearance.

"Thank you; I do not suppose it is in your power to do the one thing I wish—give me back my jewels, for they *are* mine, Mr. Coolidge, notwithstanding it seems improbable for a poor girl to own such valuables," she replied, her color rising.

"I do not doubt it in the least," he answered, impulsively. "I know that you are truth and purity itself, and, believe me, you shall yet have your own."

"Ah! can I?" she interrupted, her face lighting up with its wonted beauty for a moment.

Oh, how he loved her! and how it thrilled him, that any words of his should have the power to make her beautiful countenance brighten like that.

"Yes, you *shall* have them again," he said. "I cannot restore them to you to-day, but just as soon as my father returns I shall acquaint him with what has happened, and he will see that justice is done."

"Thank you," Brownie said, appreciating his kindness, yet fearing that his mother and sister would outwit him, and influence his father against her.

"I feel deeply mortified," he went on, dropping his eyes, "that any one who is akin to me should be guilty of doing what my sister did yesterday; and the treatment which you afterward received—there can be no excuse for it."

"Do not speak of it again, Mr. Coolidge; it is past and cannot be recalled. Your kindness and sympathy have lightened my heart already; and as I go away, it will be a comfort to know that I have your esteem and friendship."

The young girl was deeply touched by his sympathy and distress.

"Go away! What do you mean?" he asked, looking up startled.

His mother had not told him that she was going away.

"Surely you do not think that I would remain where my truth and honesty are called in question!" she replied, with dignity.

"Where will you go?" and his brow contracted with pain.

She could not stay; it were folly to think of it, he knew.

But it was like taking the sun from the heavens to have her go.

"I do not know," she said, with a sigh, and her tone, so sadly sweet, moved him to his very soul.

She had been with them less than three months, but during that time she had grown to be the one woman in the world to him.

He had learned to watch and live upon her every motion and expression, to listen eagerly for her footsteps and even the soft rustle of her clothing. The lightest sound of her voice, her very presence, thrilled him as nothing else had ever done before. He had lived a new life since her coming. He knew he was a better man for it.

She had stirrrd into being new motives and purposes, and he was beginning to think of forsaking this idle way of living, and of trying to fit himself to be useful in the world, and worthy of *her*.

And now she was being driven away like a criminal, and insulted by his own kin.

If she should go away thus, with this dreadful cloud hanging over her, what would become of her? Who would take her in?

His pulses throbbed wildly; he grew desperate with the thought.

"You do not know? Will you let me tell you where to go?" he breathed, bending eagerly toward her, his face flushing hotly, and his eyes glowing with the wild love which moved him.

She looked up a little surprised by his manner, and her clear eyes fell before his passionate gaze.

"Darling," he cried, seizing her little hands, "you do not know where to go? Come to me. My dear, my dear, you do not know how I have learned to love you since you came like a

ray of light into this household. Come to me, Meta—be my wife, and no stain shall touch you; they shall not dare to breathe aught against you; place your hand in mine, and I will plant myself between you and all harm. My love, my love, I have found you. I have seen many fair women, but now I have found my fate, the sweetest fate man ever found. Say, dearest, will you be my wife?"

She sat before him white, and still, and dumb.

The color which but a few moments before had begun to creep into her cheeks at his words of sympathy, now fled before this avalanche of love which he poured upon her.

She had never dreamed that he loved her like this, although he had always seemed to enjoy her society, and she had believed that his mother's and Isabel's fears had only been caused by their own jealous hearts.

She had no chance to speak; he had poured forth his words so wildly, and she did not even remove her hands from his for a moment, her surprise holding her spell-bound.

She knew he was sincere, and that his whole soul had yielded itself up to her. She could see it in his eager look, she could feel it in the passionate clasp and quiver of his strong hands.

But she did not love him.

No; she was sure of it. She did not even stop to debate the question within her own mind; she was not even moved by his wild words, except to feel a sort of tender sorrow for him that she must destroy all his hopes.

But even as she sat there, trying to think of the gentlest way to tell him this, there came to her the remembrance of another pair of eyes into which she had once looked, and felt her soul

thrill with a peculiar joy, and of a strong yet gentle clasp, which had seemed for a moment to inclose her within the gates of Paradise.

No, she did not love Wilbur Coolidge, and if she did she could not be his wife, and subject herself to the scorn and contempt which she would receive from his family.

Something of this he must have read in her face, for he said, tenderly:

"Brownie, you do not answer me. Will you not crown my life with the blessing of your love? They shall never harm you. We will go away where they cannot trouble you by so much as a word. Will you not speak and give me hope?"

She drew back from him, pained and sorrowful.

"Mr. Coolidge, if I speak at all, it must be to crush all hope of any such thing as you desire," she said, sadly, with downcast eyes and crimson cheeks.

"Meta! Miss Douglas! *no!*" he cried, hoarsely, his handsome face clouding with pain.

"Yes, Mr. Coolidge; hard as it is for me to wound you thus, when you offer me the greatest homage a woman can ever receive—the love of an honest heart—yet I cannot bid you hope, for I do not love you in return."

"You have not had time to think of it. I have startled you with my abruptness; you do not know your own heart yet," he said, his lips growing white and quivering.

"I have not, indeed, had time to think, for I did not at once imagine that you cherished any such feelings toward me. But my heart does not respond to yours. No, Mr. Coolidge, I cannot be your wife."

"Are you sure—are you very sure you can never love me, Meta?" he pleaded, while great drops came out upon his forehead.

"Quite sure," she said, firmly, though kindly.

"Brownie, Brownie, when I love you so; when I have listened eagerly for the sound of your footfall; when even the tone of your voice has been music to me from the first; when every fiber of my being has twined itself about you! Oh! it is too cruel; I cannot have it so—only give me one little ray of hope, and I will wait years if need be."

His voice sounded like the cry of the lost, and he caught his breath with a hard dry sob, that made the young girl's heart ache with pity for him.

She arose from the chair where she had been sitting, and the great tears rolled swiftly over her flushed cheeks.

"Mr. Coolidge, be assured if I could truthfully speak the words you wish, I would do so; but it cannot be, and as it will only give us both pain to meet again, let me say good-by to you here, for I go this evening. Please accept my thanks for your kindness to me, and let me still be your friend."

She held out her hand to him and he took it, his whole frame shaking with the great bitterness which well nigh crushed him.

He lifted it to his lips, then broke down entirely, and with one quick movement, gathered her close in his arms, and pressed his lips to her white brow.

"My darling, my darling," he groaned, "forgive me, but you can never know the wretchedness of this moment to me."

At that moment the library door sprung open, and Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel stood upon the threshold.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEALOUSY.

Mrs. Coolidge and her daughter had only been some ten minutes on their way, when the latter discovered that she had forgotten her pocket-book and memorandum, consequently they had to return for them.

Isabel had entered the house, intending to run up stairs and back again, but hearing low voices in the library, she stopped to listen a moment, wondering who was within; then, with flashing eyes and scarlet cheeks, she stepped to the door and beckoned to her mother to come in.

Mrs. Coolidge quickly obeyed the summons, and as soon as she learned who were the inmates of the library, she threw open the door, and just in season to behold the scene described in the last chapter.

With a feeling of utter dismay, Brownie disengaged herself from Wilbur Coolidge's embrace, and started to leave the room.

But the two women barred the way, and would not let her pass; while Mrs. Coolidge demanded, in stern tones:

"Pray, what is the meaning of this affecting scene?"

Wilbur colored deeply, but braced himself for battle.

"Mother—Isabel—let Miss Douglas pass!" he commanded, in a voice as stern as Mrs. Coolidge's own.

They dare not disobey him in that mood, and moving aside, Brownie passed out, and sped swiftly to her own room.

"Now I will answer your questions, if you have any to ask," the young man said, folding his arms, and regarding them with a gloomy brow.

"I should like to know how that designing hussy succeeded in entrapping you into making such a fool of yourself?" said Isabel, furiously.

"Really, Isabel, you are acquiring an elegance of speech at which I am surprised!" retorted her brother, sarcastically.

"Wilbur, hush! Isabel, keep quiet!" said Mrs. Coolidge, authoritatively. Then, turning to her son, she continued:

"I am astonished, my son, at what I have just witnessed. That girl will ruin the peace of this family yet."

"She has ruined it already, as far as I am concerned," he replied, moodily; then added:

"But, mother, Miss Douglas is in no way accountable for what you saw. I alone am to blame. I had just asked her to be my wife——"

"*What!*" exclaimed both women, aghast.

"Yes; I began to love that beautiful girl the first moment I saw her. Further intercourse has only served to deepen and strengthen that sentiment, and to-day I resolved to ask her to be my wife, that I might shield and protect her from further insult and abuse on your part."

"Indeed!" said his mother, growing white with anger.

"When is the wedding to take place between you and this lovely beggar?" sneered Isabel.

"I warn you not to try me too far, either of you!" Wilbur replied, with a dangerous gleam in his eye; then added:

"You did not permit me to finish my statement. However, I have only to tell you that Miss Douglas has refused me."

His mother heaved a sigh of intense relief, and murmured:

"What an escape!"

While Isabel retorted:

"Showed her good sense for once! She probably knew she would not be received into a *respectable* family after what occurred yesterday. You always were a fool when there was a pretty face around."

"Thank you! But be it known to you both, that if she had so chosen, I *should* have made Miss Douglas Mrs. Wilbur Coolidge just as soon as the law would have allowed," was the stern reply.

"Now, if you please," he added, addressing his mother, "I would like you to write a recommendation for Miss Douglas."

"A recommendation for what—truth and honesty?" she sneered.

"For her thorough education and superior accomplishments, and her efficiency and success as a governess," he retorted, firmly.

"I shall do no such thing!" was the indignant reply.

"Then, mother, mark my words, if Miss Douglas goes away from here without a recommendation from you, as a good governess, a refined and cultivated lady, I leave this house also today, and utterly refuse to accompany you farther on your tour. Is it not enough," he continued, excitedly, "that you abuse and insult her, prowling about among her possessions, and appropri-

ating them, without driving her forth from your home with no means of providing for herself in the future?"

"Of course those jewels do not belong to her, Wilbur—why will you persist in such nonsense? I honestly believe the girl is a thief!" said Mrs. Coolidge, impatiently.

"But just suppose the future proves they *are* her property, who, then, will be the thief?" he demanded, hotly.

"Why, if she can *prove* it to me *satisfactorily*, then I shall have to yield them up to her, of course," replied Mrs. Coolidge, flushing, and not relishing this side of the question.

"Will you give her the recommend?"

"I suppose I shall have to, in order to keep you with us."

She dreaded nothing so much as his roaming off by himself.

"Then make it out at once—and a *good* one let it be, too; for Miss Douglas leaves to-day."

"Does she, indeed? I have not dismissed her yet, I believe," sneered the irate woman. But she sat down to the table and began to write.

"That will not be necessary, since she has already decided to go."

"Thank you," he said, as she handed him what she had written, and he ran his quick eye over it. "That will do nicely. Now, if you will give me what you owe her, I will hand both to her at the same time."

She saw that her son was in no mood to be trifled with, and did as he requested, although inwardly resolving to be equal with the despised governess, if ever the opportunity should offer.

Wilbur took both paper and money, and left the room. He

went directly to Brownie's door, and tapped. She opened it, and he saw that she had been weeping. The sight filled him with self-reproach.

"Forgive me," he said, regretfully, "for having added to your unhappiness by my selfishness. I would have given my right arm rather than that this should have happened. But," he added, after a moment's pause, "I did not come here to say this; I came to bring you these, that you might be saved any further unpleasantness," and he handed her the money and paper.

"Thank you," she said, touched by his kindness.

She opened the paper, and read Mrs. Coolidge's recommendation. It was all that she could ask, or even desire. She counted the money, and found that there were five pounds more than were actually due her. A painful flush overspread her lovely face, as she separated them from the rest of the money; then, folding it within the recommendation, she passed it back to Wilbur, saying, briefly, but proudly:

"I cannot make use of these."

"I understand you," he said, humbly, "and I cannot blame you; but I thought in this strange city you would need something of the kind."

"I do need it—indeed, I do not know how I am to get along without something of the kind; but, after what has occurred, I could not use *that*," Brownie said, with a weary sigh.

He bowed, but did not press her to take it; then, after a moment's thought, he asked:

"Miss Douglas, would you make use of one signed by my father?"

"Yes, and be very thankful for it," she replied, her eye brightening.

"You shall have it; I will make it my first business to obtain a good recommendation for you as soon as he returns, and send it to you."

"Thank you; you are very kind," and a tear sprang to her eye at his thoughtfulness.

"When do you go?" he asked, as he was about turning away.

"As soon as I can pack my trunks and send for a cab."

"Can I help you in any way?"

"If you will order the cab for me, it will save me a little trouble," she answered, smiling wearily.

"*Anything* that I can do will be a pleasure," he replied, though an expression of anguish swept over his handsome face as he bowed and left her.

In two hours she was ready, her trunks strapped and in the lower hall, waiting for the cab.

With a nearly breaking heart, Brownie sought Viola and Alma to bid them farewell.

They were deeply distressed at the thought of parting with her, and protested loudly against it. She had won their hearts completely during her short stay with them, and felt that with right and careful training they would make noble women; but her work there was over, and she could only breathe a prayer that her successor might be conscientious and wise in her dealings with them.

Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel ignored her departure entirely, and did not show themselves, much to Brownie's relief.

As Wilbur, with clouded brow, and white, compressed lips, assisted her into the cab, he asked :

"Where to, Miss Douglas?"

"To the 'Washington' for the present. It is a good hotel, and has a familiar sound which seems quite home-like," she answered, trying to smile, but he saw that her lips quivered.

She felt inexpressibly desolate and forlorn.

"Then if I address a note to you there within a few days or a week, you will get it," he said.

"Yes."

"May I call?"

"No, Mr. Coolidge, I prefer you should not; it would be wiser not to do so at present," Brownie answered, gently, but firmly.

She knew if she gave him permission, it might lead him to hope, and, besides, it might cause her further trouble if his mother and sister should discover that he was visiting her.

He colored, wrung her hand, and shut the door; then giving her direction to the driver, she was whirled away.

Wilbur returned to the house very sore at heart. Life seemed to him very dark just then; its brightness had all vanished with Brownie.

He went back to the library. No one was there.

He passed on up stairs to his mother's rooms, and found both her and Isabel within.

They had been watching his leave-taking of the despised governess, and now turned upon him, with faces of scorn.

"Now that your inamorata has departed, I hope you will show some common sense, Wilbur," his mother said, sharply.

He took no notice of the remark, but handed her the recommendation, with the money inclosed, in silence.

"What does this mean? Ah! she would take only what was due her, and you did not give her the recommendation, after all," she said, in tones of satisfaction, as her quick eye ran over it.

"I did not give it to her?" cried her son, angrily. "Of course I gave it to her; but the poor insulted girl refused to take it; she refused to obtain another situation upon *your* recommendation."

"The upstart! I'd like to box her ears soundly for putting on such airs!" exclaimed Isabel, spitefully.

"Upstart indeed! I'll warrant that there is better blood now in her veins than ever flowed in ours. She has been born and bred a *lady*, which is more than I can say of you. There is some mystery about her, I admit; but, mark my words, the time will come when both of you will be glad to cultivate her acquaintance, and when you will rue the day that you, led on by your curiosity and covetousness, ever meddled with her treasures, and drove her from your house by your abuse."

Wilbur Coolidge spoke indignantly and at random, but in after months he remembered his words, and wondered at the truth of his prophecy.

Before he had concluded there came a rap upon the door.

Isabel opened it.

A servant stood without bearing a silver salver, upon which lay a card.

"A gentleman to see Miss Douglas," he said, bowing respectfully.

"A gentleman to see Miss Douglas!" repeated Mrs. Coolidge, contemptuously, while Isabel pounced upon the card and read the name, "Adrian Dredmond."

The color flushed over her fair face in a scarlet flood.

"There is some mistake here," she said, sharply, to her servant.

Then turning to her mother, she added:

"Mamma, it is Lord Dredmond."

She had persisted in giving him this title ever since she had learned that he was the grandson of an earl, although Wilbur had repeatedly told her that he did not care to have it used until he came into his property. He was very modest about it.

"Of course, there is a mistake," returned Mrs. Coolidge. "You had better pay more attention. The gentleman doubtless wishes to see Miss Isabel," she said, severely, to the servant.

"The gentleman inquired for Miss Douglas," he persisted.

"Well, did you tell him that she had gone?"

"Gone! I did not know that Miss Douglas was out," the man replied, in surprise.

He had been engaged in another part of the house when Brownie departed.

"Isabel, you must go down and receive him yourself. Find out, if you can, what he wants of her, and make yourself as agreeable as possible to him," Mrs. Coolidge remarked, running her eye critically over her daughter, to see that everything was all right.

"It is time that minx was out of the way; she seems to have a strange faculty for bewitching the gentlemen, without appearing to do so," muttered Isabel, as she swept from the room,

smoothing out her distorted face, and followed by her brother's contemptuous glances.

Wilbur himself soon after arose and left.

A jealous feeling was beginning to creep into his own heart, and he wondered what Adrian Dredmond could want of Brownie Douglas.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH.

When Isabel entered the drawing-room, Mr. Dredmond arose to salute her; but an expression of disappointment swept over his fine face, when he saw Miss Coolidge instead of Miss Douglas.

Isabel approached him, holding out her white hand, and saying, cordially:

"This is a pleasure, truly, my lord."

He flushed at the title.

"You mistake, Miss Coolidge," he said, smiling, as he shook hands with her, "I am not my lord, or, at least, I should say, that I prefer not to answer to that title at present. While my grandfather lives I prefer to be only plain Mr. Dredmond."

"The title suits you, nevertheless," she answered, sweeping him an admiring glance, and then drooping her lashes shyly.

"I hope to be worthy of it when it becomes mine," he replied, gravely, and wondering why she did not explain Miss Douglas' absence.

But it was no part of her plan to do so.

She intended to appropriate the call to herself, and make the most of her opportunity.

Ever since she had learned that he was heir to an earldom

she had resolved to exert all her powers to win him, and become "my lady," and now she set herself to work to charm him.

She began chatting in a lively manner, and possessing much native tact, and a very pleasing address, she beguiled him out of half an hour before he was aware of it.

"I beg your pardon," he said, starting, when he heard the hall clock strike, "but I wished to see Miss Douglas. I have a little piece of property belonging to her, which I desire to return."

Isabel longed to ask what it was, but dare not.

"Miss Douglas!" she said, with elevated eyebrows, and well-assumed surprise.

"Yes; I inquired for her when I gave my card to the servant."

"I am sorry there should have been any mistake, Mr. Dredmond," replied Isabel, smiling sweetly, but inwardly raging, "but the servant must have misunderstood, for he brought your card to me; besides, Miss Douglas is not with us now, she has left."

"Left! Indeed I thought she came abroad with you, and intended to return with you," he said, in great surprise, and beginning to think that all was not right.

"I know nothing as to her *intentions*, Mr. Dredmond, but we have been pained to discover that Miss Douglas is not trustworthy, and mamma was therefore obliged to dispense with her services."

The lie stung her tongue, but she remembered his evident admiration of Brownie the night of the opera, and she resolved to disenchant him if possible.

"Not trustworthy?" he exclaimed, aghast.

He would have staked his own honor against hers.

"It is very painful, is it not, Mr. Dredmond, when she appeared so innocent and was so beautiful?" asked Isabel, with a sad smile.

He did not reply, and she went on:

"But we found that she had been taking that which did not belong to her, and, of course, mamma could not longer trust the girls under her influence."

The artful girl's tone and manner expressed the deepest regret, but he was not deceived by it, although her statement of Brownie's dishonesty confounded him.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated, with a pained, startled look, and his mind went back to that moment when her pure face lay for one moment upon his bosom, and when she had lifted her clear eyes, which were like shining pools of purest water, so trustingly to his, and now he was told that she was a thief!

He knew better.

If ever truth and purity of purpose were written upon any face, they were written upon hers.

"It does not seem possible, I admit," Isabel hastened to say, caring she had been unwise, and not liking the way he had received her information. "Mamma and I were infinitely shocked when we discovered it, but the proof was too incontestable, even without her evident guilt, for us to doubt."

"Was she—did she confess her—fault?" he stammered.

"Oh, no! *such* persons never do that, you know; they always put on any amount of airs, and make a great show of innocence. But then we had the proof right in our own hands."

"Would you mind telling me what she has done—what proof you have of her guilt? Perhaps there may be some misunderstanding to which I could suggest an explanation," he said, inwardly writhing with pain at her words.

"Excuse me; but that would not be right, and I fear that I have been very unwise to speak of it at all. The girl is gone, and I have no wish to injure her; I only hope she may repent of her folly, and try to do better in the future. Please forget what I have said, Mr. Dredmond, and do not remember it against her if you should ever meet her again. I assure you it is a very painful topic to me."

She wiped an imaginary tear from her eye, and immediately changed the subject of conversation by asking if he intended being present at Lady Peasewell's drawing-room the following Wednesday evening.

"I presume so—I don't know—I believe we have cards," Adrian stammered, his mind fully occupied with thoughts of that delicate, lovely girl, who had been driven forth into a strange wilderness of which she knew absolutely nothing.

He began to be conscious of a great pain in his heart, on account of her misfortune, and he did not need to be told of the abuse which she had suffered. The memory of that conversation which he had overheard between Miss Coolidge and her mother, on board the steamer, was too fresh in his mind.

He did not for a moment believe her to be guilty of what Isabel accused her.

He did not doubt that there was some serious misunderstanding, and he longed to know what it was; but he saw that she

was unwilling to tell him, and he was too much of a gentleman to press the matter further.

After a few moments more spent in general conversation, he arose to go.

"Can you give me Miss Douglas' present address?" he asked. "I would really like to return what belongs to her."

She would not have told him for a kingdom, had she known, but she replied, with every appearance of kindness:

"How sorry I am, but really I do not know. Indeed, I was so shocked and disappointed to discover one so young and lovely so old in guilt, that it did not occur to me to ask where she was going."

It nettled him exceedingly to have her talk thus; and could she have read his heart, she would have seen at once that there was little chance of her becoming "my lady."

"Should you discover where she is, will you kindly inform me?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly, with great pleasure," smiled the fascinating hypocrite.

"I still think you will find there has been some mistake, Miss Coolidge," he added, gravely. "I knew something of Miss Douglas before meeting her in this country, and the statement you have made regarding her seems utterly impossible."

"You!" exclaimed Isabel, her heart bounding wildly. "Did you know Miss Douglas in America?"

Perhaps, after all, here was the solution of the mystery of those beautiful gems, and that card with the names of counts and lords upon it. Had he had anything to do with it?

Her brain reeled at the thought.

Was she then the thief after all?

She hung breathless on his reply.

"I knew of her, although I never made her acquaintance, until your brother introduced me at the opera the other evening."

She breathed more freely now; he had not given Brownie the gems, that was evident. He knew nothing of the card.

"I have friends who know her intimately," he went on, watching her keenly, to mark the effect of his words. "She was a Philadelphian, and belonged to a very wealthy and honorable family. About a month ago—perhaps a little more—death and misfortune suddenly deprived her of everything. She is very highly educated, as undoubtedly you have discovered, and before the trouble came upon her, she moved in the very best circles. I speak of this merely to show you why I believe it impossible for Miss Douglas to be guilty of what you accuse her. I trust also to hear ere long that you have been mistaken."

And with this thorn planted in Miss Isabel's conscience, Adrian Dredmond bowed himself from her presence, leaving her astounded, confused, and with a heavy weight of guilt upon her heart.

What had she done?

Accused an innocent girl of theft, and stolen a fortune from her; then driven her forth in disgrace into an uncharitable world to beg her bread or starve; for likely as not it would come to that since she had no recommendation wherewith to gain another place.

She sat for an hour in anything but agreeable meditation.

She was frightened at what she had done, and the possible consequences, but she was not sorry.

Oh, no; she could have set her foot ruthlessly upon Brownie Douglas' heart, and crushed the life out of it rather than that she should become her successful rival in the race for Adrian Dredmond and his title.

But she feared discovery—she feared now, as much as she had laughed at the idea before, that Brownie would have her arrested for taking the jewels, and if the circumstance should become known to Mr. Dredmond, he would undoubtedly come forward, knowing what he did, and testify to the truth of her statements, and, in that case, she could only see infinite trouble and disgrace for herself.

She did not know what to do, or which way to turn in the matter. Had she known Miss Douglas' address, she would have hastened to send the casket to her, and considered herself lucky to be so well rid of it.

"If only Wilbur did not know about it, mamma and I could hide the jewels, and deny all knowledge of them," she murmured, in deep perplexity.

She finally resolved that she would say nothing to any one concerning what Adrian Dredmond had told her, but keep the matter to herself for a few days at least; and if the governess did come to demand the jewels again, she would tell her mother, and persuade her to give them up quietly and save further trouble.

"At all events," she added, with a sigh of relief, as she went to her own room, "she is gone, and I've nothing more to fear from her charms."

Adrian Dredmond left the Coolidge mansion in a fever of impatience and indignation.

That any one should accuse Brownie Douglas of the crime of theft was sufficient to drive him wild.

What had she stolen?

Surely nothing of Miss Coolidge's beauty or breeding, he thought, with a contemptuous smile, for he had fathomed her ill-nature and desire to injure the lovely girl at once, and Miss Isabel had neither beauty nor good breeding to lose.

"She is innocent as an angel," he murmured, softly, then added, with a scowl: "And *they* are hard-hearted as devils!"

Did he not know that she had been reared with tenderest care? Had she not the blood of royalty in her veins? and had he not seen her in all the brightness and purity of her young life, and been assured of her integrity by his friend Gordon?

How well he remembered that scene in the vestibule of the Art Gallery, when she had appeared like some beautiful vision to him, with her bright, sweet face, and clad so richly, yet simply, in her plain black silk, protected by the linen ulster. How lovely she had looked, with not a jewel to deck her, excepting that rich coral clasp at the throat.

How kind and considerate she had been, although brimming over with laughter at the ridiculous plight of the fashionable belle, and how courteously she had addressed that clown who had caused so much trouble and embarrassment.

Her every look, tone, and movement had betokened the true lady, both then and recently when he had met her at the opera.

She guilty of stealing!

"The angels would as soon think of robbing Paradise as she of purloining from Isabel Coolidge," he said, indignantly. "I will find her," he continued; "she is alone and friendless in this great, strange city. How cruel of them to turn her away without any notice, and of course with no recommendation by which to procure another situation. I will seek her and find her, and then use my influence to secure her a position, unless——"

He did not complete the sentence, but the rich blood mounted to his temples as he walked on with moody brow, the pain and disappointment growing every moment keener in his heart. He had not been able to banish Brownie's lovely face from his memory since that first meeting in the Art Gallery.

He had been greatly disappointed not to see her again; of course he could not force himself upon her during her first great grief for her aunt, and when he next inquired for her of his friend Gordon, he learned, to his dismay, that she had left the city.

He had been startled upon beholding her as she came on board the steamer at New York, and when he saved her from falling, and held her clasped for one moment in his arms, the blood coursed wildly in his veins, and he felt almost as if she belonged to him. Then he lost sight of her at Liverpool, and met her again at the opera in London; and now, just as he had been so sure of seeing her again, and becoming more intimately acquainted with her, she had vanished, leaving him more disappointed than he had ever been over anything before.

That evening, as he sat in his own room, his valet brought him a note.

It was signed by Wilbur Coolidge, and told him that he would find Miss Douglas at the "Washington."

Wilbur, it will be remembered, was in his mother's room when the servant brought in Mr. Dredmond's card, and asked for Miss Douglas.

He had also seen the young nobleman when he went away, and noting his disappointed and pained appearance, concluded that his sister had prejudiced him against Brownie.

He knew that the young man would befriend the friendless girl if it was possible; he knew, also, that he was at present powerless to do so, and bearing his sister no love for the part which she had played in this trouble, he resolved to be even with her by giving Adrian Miss Douglas' address, and let what would come of it.

As early the following morning as it would do, Adrian Dredmond presented himself at the "Washington," and inquired for Miss Douglas.

The clerk turned to his book and looked over the names of the new arrivals.

Hers was not there!

Mr. Dredmond was in despair.

"Are you sure?" he asked, anxiously.

For reply the clerk placed the book before him, and pointed with his finger to the list of arrivals for the last two days.

It was even as he had said; her name was not there!

"Did no young lady arrive here alone yesterday?" Adrian asked, thinking that possibly she might have assumed another name in her distress.

The clerk sneered and regarded him curiously.

"No; it is very seldom that *ladies* come here unattended," he said.

Mr. Dredmond colored angrily.

Must he hear her maligned even here?

Disgusted with the man, and deeply disappointed, he threw him a sovereign for his trouble, and went away.

"I *will find her!* where can she be? has anything happened to her?" he asked himself almost in despair.

For two days after he returned to the Washington, making the same inquiries and receiving the same answer.

No, Brownie Douglas had not been there, and she never came.

He sought her at every respectable hotel in London, but not a trace of her could he find.

He haunted the streets where genteel lodgings were advertised, but without success.

On the Sabbath he walked the streets, peering into every young face that he met, but those clear brown eyes never greeted his weary search, and that lovely face was but a vision in his memory.

Monday he went to Wilbur and told him of Miss Douglas' strange disappearance, and his fruitless search for her; and the young man was nearly distracted himself.

"They have driven her to her death, curse them!" he muttered fiercely, and he told Adrian the story of the jewels.

His father had returned unexpectedly, and he acquainted him also with the facts of the case.

A scene ensued which was long remembered by both Isabel

and her mother, while Mr. Coolidge spared no trouble or expense to find the unfortunate girl.

Wilbur had been so bound up in his own sorrow that he had paid no attention to the number of the cab in which Brownie had gone away, neither had he noticed the driver; so that although he sought out and questioned every cabby that he could find, he could gain no clew to the missing girl.

Mr. Coolidge advertised and engaged a detective to look her up, while Adrian Dredmond and Wilbur haunted the streets day and night, but all to no purpose.

Beautiful Brownie Douglas—abused, insulted, friendless—seemed to have dropped out of existence as completely as a star when it falls from its place in the heavens!

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

Meanwhile the evening of Lady Peasewell's drawing-room came and went.

Isabel Coolidge spared no pains or expense to make herself captivating for the occasion, and she succeeded admirably.

Her mind dwelt continually upon Adrian Dredmond, and the hope of ultimately winning him for herself; for she had been told that his grandfather possessed a rent-roll of sixty thousand pounds yearly, while the young man himself had quite a fortune in his own right; and although she did not stop to analyze the feelings of her heart toward him, yet her interest in him was evidently gauged somewhat according to his expectations.

Her father's unexpected return, and his anger at her own and her mother's treatment of Miss Douglas, had threatened to upset all her plans, however.

He demanded that the jewels be brought to him, and another exciting scene ensued over them.

It must be confessed that he was somewhat confounded himself when he beheld them, and a feeling of doubt entered his mind regarding Brownie's honesty; but he would not confess it to his family, and censured them in no light terms for the dis-

honorable way in which they had become possessed of the rare stones.

It all ended in angry tears on the mother's and daughter's part, and in his taking charge of those unfortunate trinkets which had caused so much trouble, and locking them securely up.

The morning of Lady Peasewell's drawing-room Isabel sought her mother, discontent written upon every line of her fair, proud face.

"Mamma," she said, "I have not a decent jewel to wear with my costume to-night."

"I am sure you always considered your diamonds good enough for anything until you saw those others," Mrs. Coolidge replied, in an injured tone.

"But I had set my heart upon wearing that tiara, and that superb necklace. It is too bad."

"It is all too bad from beginning to end, that our trip abroad must be spoiled by that girl. Wilbur looks as if he could never forgive us, and your father is very angry with you for entering her room and pulling over her things, and I advise you not to mention the subject to him again."

"Humph! It seems to me that he is wonderfully interested in Miss Douglas' welfare for a married man," sneered the dutiful daughter.

"There! you can leave my presence if you are going to talk in that way!" returned Mrs. Coolidge, coloring an angry red.

She was somewhat sensitive upon that point herself, although she did not like to confess it.

Isabel dawdled away the morning in a state of fretful unhap-

piness, and declared to herself, over and over again, that her appearance would be ruined without the governess' jewels.

After dinner, however, her father complained of a raging headache; two hours later he was in a high fever, and all thoughts of his attending the evening's festivities were relinquished.

From that moment Isabel's spirits rose, the clouds vanished from her brow, and she was even heard humming a gay opera air.

"Wilbur can act as our escort, mamma; so we shall be all right," she said, when her mother complained of the circumstance as spoiling all their pleasure.

"I have no heart for it, and would not go myself, were it not on your account," she replied, wearily.

Her husband's displeasure, and the fate of the missing governess, still weighed heavily on her conscience.

A few hours later she and Wilbur were waiting in the drawing-room for Isabel to make her appearance.

"Does my amiable sister contemplate a brilliant conquest to-night, that she is so long making her toilet?" sneered the young man, who had been pressed into the service, and was impatient of the delay.

"Do speak a little more kindly of Isabel, my son," said Mrs. Coolidge, adding, with a heavy sigh: "In all probability she will marry some day, and it is desirable that she should make a good match."

"Certainly; only there may be a difference of opinion as to what a 'good match' is," he returned, sarcastically.

"I consider any one who occupies a good position in the world, and who has plenty of money, an eligible *parti.*"

"Regardless of either heart, brain, or principles," interrupted Wilbur, cynically.

"Why will you be so disagreeable, Wilbur? Of course, I expect your sister will exercise good judgment in the matter, and I have no fear of her letting herself down, or losing her head by any silly nonsense," retorted Mrs. Coolidge, pointedly.

Wilbur understood her insinuation perfectly, but would not notice it enough to reply, and just then the rustle of rich, trailing garments was heard upon the stairs.

A moment later the door opened, and Isabel entered.

There was an instant's silence as both mother and son turned to contemplate her.

"Isabel!" exclaimed the former, in tones of gratified pride.

"Whew!" whistled her brother, under his breath.

There was cause, truly, for these ejaculations of pleasure and surprise, for the young girl certainly had the appearance of a queen, and, for the first time in her life, she was handsome.

Her tall figure was clad in a rich white silk, with raised figures of golden maize wrought upon it. It fitted her elegantly, and swept out behind her in a graceful train. It was very simply made, being trimmed only by a fall of elegant lace from the low-cut corsage and sleeves. Its very richness was enough in itself.

Her hair was arranged *a la coronet*, around which glistened Brownie's lovely tiara of pearls, opals, and diamonds; while upon her neck she wore the wonderful diamond necklace, from which was suspended the cross which matched the tiara. Upon

her white arms she wore her own bracelets, which, although not so rich as the necklace, yet went with it very well.

She was absolutely perfect and dazzling, from the crown of her haughty head to the sole of her elegantly embroidered satin slipper.

"Will I do, mamma?" she asked, enjoying their silent admiration, and sweeping Mrs. Coolidge a profound courtesy.

"Where did you find those ornaments?" her mother asked, nervously, and unheeding her question, while Wilbur scowled his disapprobation savagely.

"Why, you know papa is sick, and it was a very easy matter to get his keys, unlock his private desk, and get them," she said, and laughed lightly, although secretly she was anxious lest there should be another scene.

"He would be very angry, Isabel, if he knew it," returned her mother, trying to speak severely, yet, in her heart, gloating over her daughter's magnificent appearance.

"I cannot help it, mamma. I had set my heart upon wearing them; they set off my dress superbly; and I was bound I would not be disappointed. He need never know it, for I can return them just as soon as we get home again, and no one will be harmed," she replied, willfully.

"Your sense of honor is extremely delicate, surely, Isabel," said Wilbur, mockingly.

"No one asked your opinion, and you can just hold your tongue. I shall go to Lady Peasewell's just as I am, and he may help it who *can!*" she retorted, rudely, and they knew it would be useless to say anything more to her.

"Isabel, you do look magnificent!" whispered Mrs. Coolidge,

when they had arrived at Lady Peasewell's, and were in the dressing-room putting the last touches to their toilet.

"Don't I? I tell you this was worth a little *finesse*," she replied, surveying herself admiringly in the double swinging mirrors; and her mother, in her heart, was glad that she had succeeded in getting the jewels, although she feared the consequences should the fact be discovered.

"Who is that queenly girl?" asked a fine-looking young man of another.

They were standing in the door-way leading from the dancing-room to the conservatory, where they had been watching the dancers for the last ten minutes.

Isabel had just swept by them in all her elegance, and it was she who had called forth the above question.

"That is a Miss Coolidge. She is an American, and belongs to a very wealthy family, who are spending a year abroad."

"I should judge she did belong to a wealthy family from her appearance. Why, she has at least a thousand pounds in diamonds on her!" said the first speaker.

"She is a stunner, eh?"

"She is that. She is the most striking woman present this evening; and yet, aside from her jewels, her dress is the most simple. Do you know her?"

"Yes; I have met her several times."

"Will you introduce me?"

"Certainly, Sir Charles."

A few moments later, as Isabel was resting after her dance, she saw two gentlemen approaching her.

"Miss Coolidge, allow me to present Sir Charles Randall, who requests the pleasure of an introduction to you."

Sir Charles bowed low, and Miss Coolidge, rising, swept him a graceful courtesy, and soon after was again circling around the room, supported upon the arm of a baronet.

She had heard of Sir Charles Randall, but had never seen him before. She knew he was reputed to be very wealthy, being an only son, and there was a prospect of more property to come in the future from a rich old aunt.

She had watched long for the appearance of Adrian Dredmond, hoping to captivate him at once by her charms. But when he did come, he only noticed her presence by the haughtiest bow, and a scornful curl of his lips, as his eyes fell upon the jewels she wore. He had never seen them before, but instinct told him at once that they were the ones which had caused so much trouble, and he despised her so heartily that she knew at once that all hope of winning him was useless.

Therefore, after her introduction to Sir Charles, she had said to herself that the next best thing to a lord was a baronet, and being a very attractive, noble-looking man, she exerted herself to charm him.

That night was one long to be remembered by Isabel Coolidge!

She was indeed, as Sir Charles had said, the most striking-looking woman in the room. Admirers flocked around her, introductions pressed upon her, men raved about her, and women yielded the palm to her for the time being: and for once she realized that she was being borne upon the topmost wave of popularity.

Mrs. Coolidge was in her element, and deemed it the proudest moment of her life, and the castles which she reared for her daughter in imagination were of the grandest character.

Sir Charles was evidently very much interested in the fair American, and certainly if she had only been as pure and beautiful at heart as she seemed, she would have been well worthy of all the admiration which she excited.

After his third dance with her he led her away to the conservatory to rest.

As they were passing through the crowd they met a white-haired, royal-looking gentleman, who, as his eyes rested upon Isabel, suddenly paused, started on, then turned back again and gave her a keen, searching glance, and finally moved on, after bowing to her companion.

"Who was that?" she asked, strangely interested, and vainly attributing the man's queer actions to admiration of herself.

"That was his lordship, the Earl of Dunforth," was the reply.

Sir Charles led her to a seat beneath a spreading palm tree, then excusing himself, he went to get her an ice.

She had danced a great deal, and was tired and heated.

With a sigh of content, she leaned back in her seat, and drew off her gloves.

Upon the forefinger of her left hand there gleamed Miss Mehetabel's engagement-ring, its central pearl surrounded with its six pure brilliants.

She had been determined to make the most of her opportunity that evening, fearing she would never have another, and

while putting on the other jewels, this had caught her fancy, and she had slipped it upon her finger.

Sir Charles was detained longer than he had intended to be gone, and while she sat there silently thinking, her hand carelessly resting upon the back of the seat, she was suddenly startled by having it seized by some one behind her, in a grip of iron, while a voice, hoarse with suppressed feeling, said:

"Where did you get this? Young woman, where did you get this ring?"

She started to her feet, and turning quickly, found herself face to face with that white-haired, stately-looking man whom but a few moments before she had inquired about—Lord Dunforth!

To say that she was startled is to say the very least, for the man's face was as white as his hair, his eyes dilated and fixed upon the ring, his lips set and livid, while the hand which grasped hers shook as if he had been stricken with the palsy.

"Where did you get it?" he demanded again, this time somewhat impatiently.

Then, as she still continued silent from fear, and not knowing how to answer him, he looked up in her face.

"And this!—and this!—oh, God! and this!" he cried, as his eyes caught the gleam of the other jewels, his voice rising in pain with each word, as he touched, first the cross, then the necklace, and last the glittering tiara upon her golden head.

She began to think him a lunatic, or else that the gems were bewitched and were about to get her into deeper trouble.

"They—they are heir-looms," she finally managed to articulate, and speaking at random.

"Did *she* give them to you?"

"Whom?"

"Meta—my Meta—Mehetabel Douglas!" he said, speaking incoherently, almost wildly.

"Yes, they used to be hers," Isabel said, thinking only of the despised and injured governess, and inwardly quaking as she wondered what would come next.

"Used to be!" he cried, catching at her words, while his face grew almost convulsed—"used to be! Then she is dead! Ah, me!" and he caught his breath in a hard, dry sob. "This was our engagement-ring," he continued, touching it again, tenderly. "How beautiful she was the night I put this upon her finger! There is not a woman here to-night as fair as she was then! And these other gems were her bridal gifts, and I thought to see her wear them when she should have been my wife. But the time never came. That is long ago—*ages ago*, it seems to me! I thought the memory of it had faded out into but a shadow, but the sight of these things to-night is like the keen edge of a knife in my heart."

His voice had grown infinitely sad. He appeared quite unnerved; his lips quivered, and tears stood in his fine eyes, while he gazed upon that ring, as if he were looking his last upon his dearest friend who was dead.

"Was she your mother?" he at length asked, breaking the spell, and looking up at her.

"No, she was not my mother," Isabel answered, guiltily, scarce knowing what to say, and yet strangely moved by his wild, sad words.

"Your aunt perhaps, then?—*she* had a brother."

"But—but," he added, with sudden thought, "*you* are not the one who wore the corals that night at the opera; she was short, and darker than you. Those were *my* gifts to Meta, and she wore them last on that dreadful night. Ah! ah! I did not think the pain was so bitter still! But my heart was broken then, and though I have tried to live bravely, I find the wound is not healed even now."

His lordship seemed to have lost all knowledge of where he was, in living over the sad past, and there is no knowing how long he might have gone on in his rambling talk, had not Sir Charles now made his appearance, bearing a salver filled with dainties for his companion.

Isabel was infinitely relieved to see him, for she was suffering torture under this forced inquisition.

The young man bowed to his lordship again as he drew near, although his face expressed some surprise at finding him conversing with Isabel.

His appearance aroused his lordship effectually. He had seemed lost and bewildered at sight of those mementoes of the past, which for him possessed so much of painful interest. But now he recovered himself almost instantly; the look of pride returned to his face; he drew his tall form to its fullest height, and with a courteous though dignified inclination to Isabel, he said, in his usual stately way:

"I beg your pardon for my seeming rudeness. There are certain circumstances under which one will sometimes forget one's self. I beg you to forgive and forget what has just occurred."

He turned and left them almost as abruptly as he came, while Isabel sank back into her seat, weak and frightened, al-

though considerably enlightened upon some points. Her tongue had seemed glued to the roof of her mouth, and she could not have answered his questions had he given her the opportunity. She was immensely relieved, however, that it had not been required of her; for she feared she should have committed herself, since it was evident that he knew the history of the jewels which she wore.

She realized now that Mehetabel Douglas, the governess, must have been a relative of another Mehetabel Douglas, who had once been engaged to this peer of the realm, and between whom some misunderstanding had risen and caused a separation. This accounted for that card with the strange titled names upon it, and also for the splendor which had so astonished her, and which she could not reconcile with Miss Douglas' otherwise destitute condition.

She had then wronged the governess; the property was hers beyond a doubt, and what should she do about it?

She was filled with dismay; she could not return the jewels, for the young girl was apparently lost to them forever, and she would have to carry about with her always the unpleasant consciousness that she was, as Wilbur had said, the thief.

But it would not do to indulge in such thoughts now, and in explanation of what Sir Charles had just witnessed, she said:

"His lordship thought from my appearance that I was the child of some one whom he knew, and he spoke to me very abruptly."

"My lord is very eccentric about some things; he is getting quite old, too, and people do not mind him," replied Sir Charles, giving the matter no further thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT VOICE!

Isabel and her mother were jubilant over the result of Lady Peasewell's drawing-room.

The occasion had been one of signal triumph for the former, for she had been universally declared the belle of the evening—the reigning star in all that brilliant company.

Not so much indeed on account of her superior beauty—for she could lay no claim to beauty of features—as her stately presence, fascinating address, and her rich and elegant attire.

Sir Charles Randal had undoubtedly been deeply impressed, for after his introduction to her he had scarce left her side during the remainder of the evening.

He called the next day, and the next he came to escort her to Buckingham Palace, the queen and her retinue being absent, and he having obtained passes to visit that royal residence so fraught with historic interest.

These incidents led to a more intimate acquaintance, until the young baronet became her almost constant attendant at the opera and other places of amusement, and it soon grew to be common talk that the fair American was likely to win him for a husband.

Isabel's heart often turned longingly toward Adrian Dred-

mond, for she had been deeply touched by him. He was her ideal of manly excellence and nobility, but she knew how useless was that longing, for that look of scorn which he had given her at Lady Peasewell's told her but too plainly how heartily he despised her.

She had met him since at a number of places of amusement, but he never asked her to dance, or noticed her presence save by a grave, cool bow, and the involuntary curling of his handsome lips; so she turned the battery of her charms upon the baronet, and with much better success.

Sir Charles was accounted a very fine young man, and a great catch, for he, too, was very rich; so that Mrs. Coolidge spread her motherly wings, ruffled her most gorgeous plumage, and made much of him, feeling immensely gratified at her daughter's evident conquest, although no proposals had as yet been made.

Two months passed thus; the search for Brownie had been given up by Mr. Coolidge, who could not gain the vestige of a clew to her whereabouts, and he finally came to the conclusion that, despairing of obtaining a situation in exclusive and aristocratic old England, she had returned to her native land, hoping to be more successful there.

What to do with her property was a puzzle to him, and he was greatly troubled on account of it, but he could only lock it carefully away, hoping some time in the future to see her and return it.

Isabel had been successful in returning the gems she had worn to the casket without his knowledge, and emboldened by her good luck, she continued, from time to time, to abstract

some of them to garnish her ravishing toilets. At length her triumph was complete.

Sir Charles Randal proposed and was accepted, and great was the rejoicing thereof.

His mother at first was somewhat troubled at the idea of his marrying out of his own country—she had hoped he would choose some one from the nobility; but as she was eager to multiply his worldly possessions, and she had heard such accounts of Mr. Coolidge's fabulous wealth, she consented as gracefully as possible, and the contract was finally concluded to the satisfaction of all parties.

Mr. Coolidge, who could not fail to honor the young man, told Isabel that she was getting a husband much too good for her, unless she mended her ways in the future, and it certainly seemed as if she had adopted his advice, for she became so amiable, apparently, that she excited the admiration of all for the time.

Lady Randal was a widow.

At the death of her husband she had been left with two sons, one fifteen, the other, which was Sir Charles, ten.

The elder died in just a year after his father, so that the younger came into the title and property.

There had been a prospect two years after Sir Charles' birth of another addition to the family, but Lady Randal was traveling upon the Continent at the time of its birth, and remained away a year after the event occurred; therefore it occasioned scarce any remark when it was reported that there was no child after all.

When, after her return to England, a friend ventured to

speak of her disappointment, Lady Randal had put her black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes, and remarked that "it was so *hard* to lose one's children," and there the matter dropped.

Not more than a week after the engagement between Sir Charles and Isabel was announced, Mr. Coolidge was suddenly recalled to New York upon important and unforeseen business.

His partner telegraphed for his immediate return, and he departed in great haste, having only a few hours in which to make his preparation and catch the steamer. And in his haste he forgot to take with him, as he had intended, Miss Douglas' casket of jewels.

As soon as Lady Randal knew of his departure, she sent a polite note, containing an invitation, to Mrs. Coolidge and her family, to spend a month with them at their country seat, as they were about departing for a season from town.

This was exceedingly flattering to the Coolidges, and the last of February found them domiciled at "Vallingham Hall," near the ancient and beautiful town of West Malling, Kent County; all but Wilbur, who, still heart-sore and filled with anxiety upon Brownie's account, resolved to try to lose himself in a trip to Switzerland and the Alps.

Lady Randal and her servants preceded her guests by a week to the Hall, leaving Sir Charles behind to escort their visitors, so that upon their arrival everything was in readiness for them, and they received a most cordial welcome.

Vallingham Hall was a handsome, though rather an ancient-looking structure, built partly of brick and partly of stone. The central portion seemed much older than the rest, a couple of wings and other additions having evidently been built on at

different times. It had mullioned windows, and wide, massive doors, which gave it a grand and imposing appearance. The beautiful ivy, green and luxuriant, which clambered upon its sides to the very top of some of its turrets, gave it also a picturesqueness which made it charming to every one, and more than one artist, enamored of its beauty, had reproduced it upon canvas.

About half a mile from the Hall, and standing within the limits of its park, there was a charming little villa of quite modern structure, and having such an air of comfort and coziness about it that tempted the beholder to seek an entrance and obtain a glimpse within, wondering if the inside were as attractive as the outside. We are privileged, let us enter.

A vestibule, with its floor of richly-colored tiles—"all Mosaic, choicely plann'd"—led into a long, wide hall, which divided the dwelling through the center.

On the right was a charming drawing-room, not too large, and furnished with rare taste and elegance.

Leading from this was a small conservatory, in which were gathered the choicest collection of plants to be found, and which filled the whole room with fragrance, while the happy songsters, which hung in their gilded cages, made the air resonant with melody.

On the left of the hall were three spacious rooms, the first an exquisite parlor or boudoir, which connected with a sleeping apartment, and which contained everything that the most fastidious could wish in the way of comfort or luxury, while further on was a library, filled with choice books and works of art.

Back of this was an L, or sort of wing, containing the dining-room and other apartments, where a buxom, good-natured damsel presided with vigorous care and skill in the culinary department.

Above were charming little suites of rooms, beautiful and luxurious enough to satisfy the most exacting, and fit bowers for the fairest virgins to dwell in.

The whole place was a gem, and one could not but cry with a great poet:

> "Oh, all things fair to sate the various eyes!
> Oh, shapes and hues that please them well!"

But, unlike that "Palace of Art," one did not come upon

> "Uncertain shapes; nor unawares
> On white-eyed phantasms weeping tears of blood,
> And horrible nightmares."

No; everything, from the airy cupola, with its many rich-hued panes above, to the solid foundations beneath, was perfect, harmonious, and cheerful.

But what of the occupants?

More of them anon.

Vallingham Hall was already gay with company when the Coolidges arrived, and more was expected the following week.

Just who the maternal Coolidge could not learn, although quite anxious to do so, and she had questioned the maid who was assigned to serve them as far as politeness would allow.

Excursions, croquet parties, archery parties, and picnics were planned for every day, when the weather would allow, while the evenings were filled with gayety and pleasure within the great drawing-room.

Sir Charles' courtship seemed to be of the most blissful nature, at least to two persons.

Isabel was brilliant from her conquest, and rendered herself so fascinating to everybody that the young man was nearly overwhelmed with congratulations at having won so bonny and wealthy a bride, although among some of the high-born damsels, who were husband-hunting for themselves, there was now and then the curl of a red lip, and murmur of scorn about "plebeian blood."

Lady Randal, ignoring caste entirely, was always eulogizing Isabel's "elegant manners, and her exquisite taste in dress," and promising herself "*so much* happiness with a daughter, which she had always wanted, but never had."

Mrs. Coolidge spared neither labor nor expense for her eldest, and her wardrobe was the most *recherche* of anything to be seen among all the visitors at the Hall, while the jewels which she wore were a marvel to every one, and helped to swell the reports of her vast wealth.

When she found that her father had departed without taking them with him, she was delighted, and appropriated them without a scruple, and, as time wore away, she began to look upon them as almost belonging to her.

It must be confessed that she stood a little bit in awe of her high-born lover.

It did not take her long to discover that he was actuated only by the loftiest sentiments.

His manner was as courteous to a servant or an inferior as to an equal, and he never stopped to consider the position of any one when granting a favor.

The beggar or the peer was befriended with equal kindness.

Open and frank himself, he could not tolerate deception or hypocrisy in any one, and a deliberate wrong incurred his deepest displeasure.

Isabel had seen him furious with a servant one day for treating with unkindness a poor little boy who had come to the door begging for bread for his mother, who was ill.

Then he had turned tenderly to the little fellow, listening patiently while he told his story, after which, with his own hands, he filled a basket with dainties, and then returned with the child to his home, to ascertain what further aid was needed.

Of course, the haughty and selfish girl could feel no sympathy with any such sentiments so foreign to her own nature; but having once learned Sir Charles' idiosyncracies, and being extremely anxious to share his coronet and plethoric purse, she exerted herself to the utmost to blind his eyes, and, to all outward appearance, she became a most earnest advocate of all his philanthropic schemes, much to his satisfaction, and the secret contempt and amusement of Viola and Alma, who neglected no opportunity when alone with their sister to torment her about it.

One evening Sir Charles invited her to walk over a portion of the estate with him, and unfolded to her his plans for beautifying it, and of improving the condition and comfort of his tenantry.

She strove to listen attentively, and appear interested in it all, but it was hard work, and although she was exceedingly kind and gracious to all whom she met, and won for herself high encomiums for her sweetness among his people, yet her heart

was not in it, and she was immensely relieved when they turned their steps homeward.

On their way they had to pass the villa before described.

Isabel had never been that way before, and did not know of its existence, and was quite surprised at the sight of the modern dwelling, where everything else was so ancient.

Just before reaching it, Sir Charles had called her attention to a lovely view, which could be seen from the hill which they had just climbed, and they stopped to look down into the valley, through which a small stream went winding and doubling in the slanting sunlight, like a thread of gold raveled from some royal garment.

Beyond, they could see the bright February sun just dropping to rest, and fine, pale bars of gold lined all the western sky, while over them hung a misty canopy of crimson vapors, "that seemed only just a vail 'twixt us and the great unknown regions beyond," Sir Charles said, enthusiastically.

They stood silent for several minutes enjoying it, when suddenly a few rich chords, struck upon a fine-toned piano, saluted their ears, and then a voice of ravishing sweetness and power burst forth into joyous song.

Isabel started at the sound as if a wasp had stung her.

"Who is that?" she demanded, her face flushing with a sudden thought and fear.

"It comes from yonder villa. Did it startle you?" asked Sir Charles, regarding her disturbed manner with some surprise.

"A little—it was so quiet before."

"I think it very fine," he replied, stopping to listen again to the clear, beatiful tones.

"Who lives there?" Isabel asked, an anxious expression on her face.

"Lady Ruxley, an aged aunt of my mother's."

"Indeed! I thought she resided with you," she said, wondering why a lady of such high degree should be living in what appeared to her such limited quarters.

She had heard of Lady Ruxley before, and knew that it was from her Sir Charles was to inherit a large amount of his property.

She had never met her, although she was quite curious about her, having heard much about her peculiarities.

"Lady Ruxley always makes it her home with us while we are in town, but when we come to Vallingham Hall she prefers to be by herself, and a few years since she had this villa built, so as to escape the gayety and confusion which always reign there," Sir Charles explained.

"Does she live alone?" Isabel queried, with a thoughtful look.

"She has never had any one but her servants, until within the past few years she has had a companion to read to and amuse her. She is quite old."

"Ah, then it must be her companion who is singing now," and she leaned eagerly forward to listen again. "Who is she?" she asked, somewhat sharply, when after a moment the sweet singer suddenly ceased.

"I really do not remember the name—some unfortunate individual, I believe, who met with an accident, enlisted Aunt Ruxley's sympathies, and she insisted upon having her as a companion. I have never seen her. Indeed," he added, smiling,

"my time has been so fully occupied in another direction lately that I have not paid much attention to other people's affairs," and Sir Charles bestowed a fond look upon his betrothed, which called the bright color to her cheeks, and the smile to her lips again.

She asked no more questions, and they remained a few moments longer gazing into the valley; then, as the sun sank out of sight, and the air began to grow keener, they turned their faces homeward.

As they passed the villa they caught a glimpse of an old woman bent nearly double with age, hobbling into the house from the vine-covered porch.

She was leaning upon the arm of a slender, graceful figure, who seemed to be clad in deep mourning, the sight of which made Isabel Coolidge's heart bound again with a sudden fear, and she bent forward for a better view.

She could not distinguish the person clearly, for the shadow of the vines about the door made it impossible, but a nameless dread of something, she knew not what, pursued her the entire evening, which neither the gay company at the Hall nor her lover's fondest words could make her forget.

CHAPTER XXII.

"CHICKENS COME HOME TO ROOST!"

The next day cards were received at Vallingham Hall for the family and all guests, soliciting their presence at a grand state dinner, to be given by his lordship, the Earl of Dunforth, at his country residence at East Malling, about five miles from the west village.

A great deal of excitement prevailed in anticipation of this event, for all recognized the honor conferred by this invitation, as the earl occupied a high position in the world, and owned almost the whole township of East Malling, where Dunforth Castle was situated.

"What shall I wear, mamma?" Isabel asked, when they were talking over the event in their own room.

"That light blue velvet, with the pipings of white satin, and the stomacher of pearls, which came from Worth's last week, will be the most suitable, I think," returned Mrs. Coolidge, reflectively.

"That is the one I had in mind. It will be very becoming; and with those coral ornaments, and a few flowers, it will be a lovely costume," assented the dutiful daughter.

"I want you to look uncommonly well, Isabel, for I heard to-day that any one who is received by the Earl of Dunforth

needs no better voucher in the first circles of London. Besides, he is a relative of the family, and it will be wise for you to secure their favor. By the way, has Sir Charles asked you to name the day yet?"

"No, and I've played my very prettiest to him this week, hoping he would. I've visited all those dirty cottages and hovels, and helped him plan a hundred disagreeable things for suffering humanity around us; but, apparently, he is so bound up in the woes of others that he cannot stop to consider things of such minor importance as his own happiness," replied Isabel, with bitter scorn, and with an ugly frown upon her brow.

"You must have patience, my dear. A great deal has been accomplished in his proposing to you, and in your acknowledged engagement."

"*Patience!* I feel as if I should go wild, at times, with the constant restraint which I put upon myself."

"I know; you are behaving beautifully," said Mrs. Coolidge, soothingly, who lived in constant fear lest there should be an outbreak. "Lady Randal," she went on, "thinks you are just about perfect; and even the servants are all enthusiastic in your praise."

"If only the prize was secure," muttered Isabel, moodily.

"Only go on a little longer as you have begun and it will be, I am sure," purred her mother.

"Won't there be a revulsion of feeling, though, when the knot is tied, and Bell is my lady, without any fear of any one else stepping into her shoes?" laughed Viola, viciously.

"I only hope I shall be present at the unmasking; won't it be fun, Vi?" sneered Alma.

"Yes, it is the finest bit of comedy I have ever seen played," returned her sister, with a tantalizing giggle.

"Hold your tongues, you saucy jades!" cried Isabel, angrily.

"I can imagine now the expression of dismay which will appear upon the serene face of Sir Charles, when he discovers the pretty little game which his 'perfect' lady-love has been playing upon him," retorted Alma, totally ignoring her sister's coarse command.

"Ha! ha! It will be fun indeed, though I shall feel no end sorry for him, for he's just gay, and I should like him for a brother-in-law," said Viola, with a feeling of self-reproach. "And won't the servants, who are so 'enthusiastic' now, have to catch it, when the 'constant restraint' is removed? Yes, indeed, poor things! they'll wish the courting had lasted forever. But I say, Al, it's lucky for her that Miss Douglas isn't here, for if she was, she'd lose Sir Charles the same as she did Mr. Dredmond."

Viola had always taken a sort of savage delight in tormenting Isabel with Adrian's evident admiration for Brownie.

Isabel, already wrought up to the last point of endurance before these chatter-boxes began, now gave way completely.

Mrs. Coolidge, deeply offended by their tormenting conversation, said, sternly:

"Viola! Alma! leave the room instantly, and be very careful hereafter that I do not hear you speak in this way before your sister, or you march back to London and go under masters at once."

The young girls obeyed, somewhat subdued by this threat

for they thought it delightful at Vallingham Hall, and to be banished to dreary London to study would be dreadful.

The day of the dinner-party arrived.

A half hour before the Vallingham company were to start, Lady Randal knocked at Isabel's door.

"Excuse me, dear," she said, "but I wanted to see how you look before we start. I am particularly anxious that Lord and Lady Dunforth should be pleased with you. You know he is a relative of the family," she concluded, with an accent of pride.

"I heard something to that effect," responded Isabel; "but how is he connected?"

"His lordship and I are own cousins," explained Lady Randal, while her face clouded for a moment, as if from some painful thought.

Then suddenly changing the subject, she exclaimed:

"But I need not have been anxious about your appearance, for you are just lovely. You have exquisite taste, my love, and I shall feel quite proud when you are my daughter. This blue velvet is charming, and your hair is very becomingly arranged, while that stomacher of pearls is superb. But"—and she started suddenly, while her face grew crimson—"but where did you get those coral ornaments?" and her eyes were fixed in utter astonishment, and with something of terror in them, upon the elegant coral and diamond cross, and butterfly hair ornament, which Isabel had just fastened in her hair, and clasped about her neck.

Isabel colored violently at the question.

Could she never wear those things without some one's re-

marking them particularly, and continually reminding her that they were not her own?

Lady Randal marked her confusion, and feeling it might have appeared a rude question, hastened to add:

"Pardon me, but they are so like some that I once saw a long time ago, that I could not help exclaiming at the moment."

The frown deepened upon my lady's brow, as if more unpleasant memories had stirred unbidden in her heart.

"Ah!" said Isabel, regaining her self-possession, and striving to speak indifferently; "I did not suppose there was another set like them in the world—they were made to order," and the lie slipped off her tongue without a quaver.

"It is a singular coincidence, surely," murmured Lady Randal, absently. "Did you ever know——" she began again then suddenly checking herself, she added: "But of course you did not, for she must be over sixty if she is living now. It is strange, though. I could have sworn they are the same."

"What were you saying?" asked Isabel, who had not distinctly understood what she said last.

"Never mind, dear; but a lady whom I used to know had some ornaments very like these. Have you nothing else which will do to go with this costume?"

She seemed to dislike the idea of her wearing them.

"Oh, yes; I have plenty of others, but these look best with this light blue—they give a dash of color which it seems to need, and I prefer them."

"Well, never mind; you *do* look very nice, and," she added, partly to herself, "perhaps *he* will not notice."

Isabel created quite a sensation upon entering the great drawing-room at Dunforth, for there were many people present whom she had never met before, and all were quite anxious to see the bride Sir Charles had chosen.

His lordship was very gracious to her, and seemed desirous to atone for his rudeness on the night of Lady Peasewell's drawing-room, though Isabel noticed that a spasm of pain contracted his face when his eye first fell upon her as she was presented.

He introduced her to Lady Dunforth, who completely surprised her by turning to a gentleman at her side, and saying:

"Miss Coolidge, allow me to present my grandson, Mr. Dredmond."

She looked up astonished, and the color flamed into her cheeks at his cold salutation and the well-remembered scornful curl of his lips, as his critical eye took in every item of her costume from head to foot.

He, too, had recognized those lovely corals with their diamond garnishings, and he longed to wrest them from her hair and bosom, and denounce her as the false-hearted woman he knew she was.

He, then, was the grandson of the Earl of Dunforth!

Isabel had known all along that he was heir to an earldom, but supposing it to be a nobleman by the name of Dredmond she had never made any inquiries about the matter.

A feeling of chagrin came over her that she had not played her cards differently, for she knew the Dunforth wealth far exceeded that of the Randals.

A sense of fear, too, arose in her heart lest he should strive to influence Sir Charles against her.

Thus do the ignoble always gauge the character of others by their own.

Lady Randal had told her that she and Lord Dunforth were cousins, consequently Sir Charles and Adrian were connected, and might he not tell him what he knew?

Later in the evening she was introduced to Lady Ruxley, whose acquaintance she had long desired to make, and whose favor she was most anxious to secure.

The old lady had arrived at the castle that morning by especial invitation, and was to remain a few days to visit Lady Dunforth, who was a favorite with her.

She was a very peculiar body, this old lady of eighty, with her wrinkled, withered face, her scant, wiry, gray hair, her restless black eyes, keen and sharp as a brier. She was bent nearly double, and walked with a cane, and when she tried to talk to or look at anybody she twisted her neck and shoulders into all manner of contortions. She was little as well as old—she could not have weighed over ninety pounds—and in her straight, old-fashioned black satin gown she made Isabel think of some witch or sprite of evil.

She felt anything but comfortable beneath those keen, bright eyes, which seemed to read her through and through at a glance, and her blunt way of asking questions disconcerted her not a little.

She felt that she was being inspected from head to foot, and that when at length she was curtly dismissed with a wave of that shriveled hand, the old woman could have told to an inch

how many yards of velvet were in her dress, the exact amount of satin it took for the piping and of lace for trimming, the number of her glove and boot, and even of the number of hair-pins it took to build her coiffure.

"I am glad she lives by herself," was her inward comment, as Sir Charles led her away. "I should never feel easy a moment to have a withered old crone like that, with her piercing eyes, prying into my affairs."

"False as fair; false as fair!" and "chickens always come home to roost!" muttered the "old crone," as she watched the handsome couple move away.

"What were you saying, aunt?" asked Lady Randal, sharply. She had been standing near, and saw the distrustful expression on her face, and heard the muttered tones.

"I said 'chickens always come home to roost,'" she snapped in reply.

"What do you mean by it? I don't understand you."

"I mean that you are going to get your pay through *her* for some of your own evil deeds in the past," she answered, pointing her shaking finger at Isabel.

"Don't be a fool, aunt," Lady Randal said, sharply, yet growing a shade paler than usual. "What have I done that is so very wicked?"

"Ah, ha! your memory doesn't serve you as well as mine, for all I am in my dotage," and the old woman gave a cracked, spiteful laugh.

Then, with a malicious leer, and crooking her skinny neck way round so that she could get a clearer view of her ladyship's face, she added:

"I haven't forgotten how, when you were yonder girl's age, you played a game upon his lordship in my own house which nearly broke his heart, and without accomplishing your purpose, too; and now I say you're going to get your pay for it."

"That was years and years ago, and I'm sure I don't see what it can have to do with Sir Charles or my affairs to-day. Don't you like Miss Coolidge? I think her very striking in appearance."

Lady Randal was evidently very much disturbed by her aunt's insinuations, and now endeavored to change the conversation.

"She has a stately presence, truly; but mark my words, Helen Capel, if you live long enough, you will find that she can plot as cunningly as you did when you admitted Count de Lussan to my parlors to ruin the happiness of an innocent and beautiful girl."

"Pshaw! what has put those absurd fancies and memories into your head to-night?" and Lady Randal tried to laugh, though she shuddered at the same time.

"Laugh away, my lady, while you can," snapped the old woman, viciously, "but you'll change your tune before long. I never quite forgave you for that night's work, Helen; it was the first time such a man ever disgraced my house, to say nothing about her coming to such grief there. But, ah! that was more than forty years ago. I wonder whatever became of her! I am sorry for Charles, though—he is a noble fellow, and ought to have a good wife," and Lady Ruxley heaved a sigh of regret.

"Then you don't approve of his choice, aunt; I'm sorry

She is certainly fine-looking, and then she belongs to a very wealthy family."

"That's it; that's it, you were never satisfied with what you had," was the impatient interruption. "You always want to hear the jingle of gold. I'd rather the boy would marry a girl like my companion, without a penny, than forty such stately, false-hearted dames, with a million apiece."

"You continue to like the girl as well as ever, then," said Lady Randal, glad to change the subject.

"Like her! there isn't her equal here to-night, for all you were so sure I'd be taken in. I tell you, Helen, these eyes of mine are good yet, if they have been well used for over eighty years."

"Where is she to-night?"

"Up stairs, reading; she would not come down, though I tried hard enough to make her. But go along to your friends, an old woman like me is not worth minding, besides, I'm going to bed presently."

She waved her hand the same as she had to Isabel, and Lady Randal moved away, feeling anxious and miserable, despite her assumed indifference.

Unpleasant memories had been rudely aroused to-night, and the sting of conscience, mingled with remorse, was severe.

"Whatever could have made her rake up those old times?" she muttered, uneasily, as she glanced at her son, who was hovering about Isabel like a moth about a candle "Can it be that she also noticed those jewels? I wonder, too, whatever became of the girl. I was rather hard on her, I confess

especially as I did not succeed in becoming Lady Dunforth myself, though I always owed her a grudge for her haughty airs. It is lucky for me, however, that he never discovered the part I played in that tragedy—he never would have forgiven it. I wonder what I did with that note—destroyed it, I suppose. Oh, dear! what a memory Aunt Ruxley has, it is as keen as her tongue, and she has made me exceedingly uncomfortable; but I would not offend her for anything on Charles' account. I do hope he will be happy, and that he has chosen wisely; he is too good to be deceived—he is like his father, poor man! Ah, me! how many men have been taken in by the girls they have married; however, it is too late to be helped now."

Such were Lady Randal's reflections after leaving her aunt.

Doubtless she has been recognized before this as being the girl of whom Miss Mehetabel Douglas had told Brownie as having been the cause of her life-long misery.

Yes, Lady Randal was that same Helen Capel. Finding, after she had accomplished her foul purpose, that she could not console her cousin, Lord Dunforth, for his loss, she turned her charms in another direction, and at last succeeded in winning a good and true man, Sir Ralph Randal, for a husband.

She had not lived the pleasantest life in the world with the baronet, or rather, it should be said, that he had discovered his mistake when it was too late.

She could not deceive him always, and after the irrevocable step had been taken he found that instead of a true, loving, and domestic wife, he had been entrapped into marrying a vain, frivolous girl, who cared more for fashion and society than she did for her family. His death had not seemed to break her

heart, for after the year of mourning expired, she returned to society with as much zest as ever.

But when her eldest son was taken from her she felt the blow more keenly, and it seemed to change her.

Charles, the younger son, had always been the favorite, and she feared lest she should lose him, too, and from that time she devoted herself to him, and during her later years became apparently the self-sacrificing and loving mother.

All her hopes now centered in him, and she bent all her energies toward carving out a brilliant future for him. And yet there were times when she seemed so troubled and melancholy that for days, and even weeks, she would be unlike herself, and as if brooding over some hidden grief or sin.

She had long since banished the memories of those deeds of her early life.

They were not pleasant to recall.

But to-night those homely old proverbs, "Chickens always come home to roost," "You'll get your pay," as uttered by Lady Ruxley, seemed to possess a strange significance, and sounded like uncanny prophecies in her ears.

How often is it thus, when "coming events cast their shadows before"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

Adrian Dredmond's identity is established at last. He was indeed the grandson and heir of Lord Dunforth, the former lover of Miss Mehetabel Douglas.

He had married, as she told Brownie, five years after the terrible disappointment which had well nigh ruined both their lives.

His wife was a sweet-tempered, gentle little body, and she loved him with her whole heart.

He liked her well enough, and respected her thoroughly, but the one love of his life had been that proud, fair-haired girl who had broken his heart. It had been a deathless love, as could easily be seen by his rambling talk the night he met Isabel at Lady Peasewell's

When he finally married he had done so to please his father, and in order to perpetuate the name.

But another disappointment awaited him, for only a daughter blessed their union, and there was no heir to take the title. At the age of sixteen she fell in love with a colonel in the English army—a widower nearly twice her age.

Her father, whose life had been such a failure, would not doom her to a like fate, and so consented to the marriage, although he did not fully approve of it, both on account of his

daughter's youth and the profession of Colonel Dredmond; since, in all probability, it would eventually separate him from his only child.

But the fair young girl-bride only lived one short year, and died soon after the birth of their only child—a fine boy, whom his father named Adrian.

Colonel Dredmond was soon after ordered into active service, and was killed fighting like the brave man he was.

Henceforth Adrian became his grandfather's sole joy and comfort, and he lavished upon him all the love which his bruised heart was capable of feeling.

The boy inherited all his father's bravery, together with his grandfather's honor and nobility of character, and bade fair to make the declining years of Lord and Lady Dunforth the best and happiest of their lives.

Lady Dunforth worshiped him, and never refused him anything which she could possibly grant him. She was intensely aristocratic, however, with all her gentleness, and very punctilious regarding forms, and it was therefore quite a source of discomfort to her, when, as Adrian grew older, he refused to be addressed by his title.

One day, when he was about fourteen, Lady Dunforth told one of the servants in his presence to perform some service for "Lord Adrian."

As soon as the man left the room he looked up with a very red face, and burst out more impetuously than courteously:

"Grandmother, I want you to hush up calling me lord."

"Why, my dear, the title belongs to you, for you will inherit everything from your grandfather," she said, persuasively.

"I don't care; I think it is ridiculous for little boys and girls to be my lorded and my ladyed, and I won't have it. Nobody shall be my lord in this house but grandfather, as long as he lives, which I hope will be till he is a hundred."

"What will you be called then, dear?"

"Adrian, while I'm a boy, and when I'm a man I'll be Mr. Dredmond. I think it is all folly to have titles anyway, setting up one over another," he said, with a scornful sniff.

"You are very democratic, my son, and this will be quite a new departure," replied Lady Dunforth, much amused, and yet secretly annoyed.

"Well, I mean it, anyhow; I won't have the servants calling me my lord, and the idea of being my lord to my own grandmother, strikes me as exceedingly absurd."

The young nobleman kept his word, and by his persistent rejection of the title, soon became "Master Adrian" to the servants, and "Young Dredmond" to his friends and associates; and he continued to retain his democratic notions as he grew to manhood, always preferring and honoring real worth to position.

During the last few weeks he had been very unhappy and depressed.

His anxiety regarding Brownie, in whom he had at last acknowledged he had more than an ordinary interest, rendered him gloomy and absent-minded.

He did not enjoy company, it irritated and angered him to look around and see others so gay, when, perhaps, the one whom he now knew he loved more than his own life, was friendless and may be suffering.

He had come down to Dunforth Castle to be present at the dinner-party to please his grandmother, but he told her, upon his arrival, that he must return to London upon the next day, as he had important business which would not allow of his absence.

That business was his constant and almost hopeless search for Brownie Douglas. His meeting with Isabel to-night made his trouble seem more bitter than ever, and for the first time in his life he felt as if he almost hated a human being.

He regretted exceedingly her engagement to Sir Charles, for he was warmly attached to the young man; but he felt that he was powerless to save him from what he feared his future would be with such a vain and selfish girl as he knew Miss Coolidge to be.

As soon as dinner was over, feeling weary and gloomy, he lighted a cigar, and went out by himself into the cool night air.

He wandered absently through the grounds, thinking, as he always did when alone, of only one, until at length he found himself at quite a distance from the castle.

The night was somewhat overcast, but not dark, for there was a full moon, which every now and then burst out gloriously from behind the clouds, and he could distinguish objects quite plainly.

About a quarter of a mile from the castle the ground arose very abruptly for a short distance, and suddenly terminated in a high precipice, which shelved out over a deep and swift-running river.

This was accounted a very dangerous spot by people in that vicinity, for the continual dropping and caving away of the

rocks and earth had left the hill above but a mere shell or shelf, hanging out over the river a hundred feet below, and which, it was predicted, was liable to be precipitated into it at any moment, since an ugly seam had appeared about twenty feet from the brink, and the spot was shunned by every one, although it used to be much frequented on account of the lovely view which it commanded.

To any one unacquainted with the path which led up this ascent, it was like tempting Providence to try to reach the top, for there were pitfalls on every side, and the path was winding and uneven.

But Adrian knew every step of the ground, for during his boyhood he had explored every inch many a time, and he clambered on now, still thinking gloomily of his own affairs.

He had accomplished about two-thirds of the distance, and he could hear the restless surging of the river, as its waters rushed over its rocky bed, when the moon came sailing out from behind a white-edged cloud, and flooded the whole landscape with its yellow light.

He looked up and swept his eye over the hill. He started, and an exclamation of horror broke from him as he did so.

He had seen some one standing on the very edge of that dangerous precipice, and gazing down into the valley beyond.

It was a woman, and the breeze made her dark, flowing garments sweep out behind her in graceful folds, and now she lifted her head, and he could faintly distinguish the outline of her face as the moonlight fell upon it.

He dare not call out to her for fear the sound of his voice would startle her, and she would be precipitated into the boil-

ing river below. For a moment the strength all went out of his body, as he thought he should never be able to reach and save her—that his extra weight upon that frail shelf must bring death to them both.

Then, without a second thought of self, he sprang forward with swift, noiseless steps.

Surely, whoever she was, she could not realize the horrible danger of that moment, and the young man's heart fairly ceased its beating, as with a few rapid strides he was at her side, and laying a firm hand upon her arm, he said, in tones thrilling with anxiety:

"Madam, do you know that you are tempting death? This portion of the hill is liable to cave at any moment."

Then, without releasing his strong hold of her, he drew her quickly back from the spot, farther and yet farther from the sound of those roaring waters, which seemed hungering for their prey, until they reached the fatal seam, which Adrian saw was now wider than ever before.

Just then a sudden shock seemed to strike him, then a rattling, rolling, horrible sound reached his ears, and a sensation of swaying and dizziness crept over him.

He knew what it meant—death!

Only one thought was in his heart now, and it rent his soul with its silent agony.

"Brownie, my Brownie, I shall never see you again!"

The next instant—he never knew how he did it—but he caught the form at his side in his arms, and sprang forward, all his strength and energies gathered into that leap for life.

Not an instant too soon, however, for the whole space which

they had just traversed was swept from their sight as if by magic, and went crashing and tumbling down into the fearful depths below, leaving that noble man and trembling woman faint, dizzy, sick, with the thought of the horrible death which they had so narrowly escaped, and clinging wildly to each other in horrified silence.

At last, with a long, shuddering breath, Adrian said, as he reverently lifted his hat and bowed his head :

"I do give hearty thanks that I was led hither at this moment."

"Amen !" was faintly breathed at his side.

"Now, who are you that have dared to risk your life like this?" he asked, thinking it must be some new servant at the castle, or perhaps some peasant lately moved into the village.

There was no answer, but the form beside him shook so from excitement and fear that, he saw, she could hardly stand.

Still keeping his hold upon her to support her, he led her still farther away from the yawning chasm, saying gently :

"Sit down upon this rock under this tree for a few moments until you regain your strength."

She obeyed, and he bent down to look into her face.

"Are you faint? Shall I go for some water?" he asked, then suddenly dropping upon his knees before her, he exclaimed : "Good God ! is it you that I have saved from *that* ? Oh ! if I had not come !" burst from him in a startled, almost anguished cry.

His voice shook like an old man's with horror, his face, as the moonlight struck it, was ashen in its hue, and for the moment he was more completely unnerved than the girl whom he

had just rescued from such imminent danger. Her hands lay white and limp in her lap.

He gathered them up in his strong clasp, and pressed his lips again and again upon them, while his breast heaved with the fierce, frightened throbbings of his heart.

Ah! only Heaven knew the horrible yet rapturous sensations of that moment, when he discovered that she whom he had just saved from a terrible death, was none other than Brownie Douglas whom he had sought so long sorrowing!

"Yes, it is I whom you have saved, Mr. Dredmond; but for you I should now be lying crushed, and bruised, and dead at the bottom of yonder stream," was the low reply, in those sweet tones, which he would have recognized at the ends of the earth.

"I little thought to find you here. I learned something of your trouble, and I have searched everywhere for you in London, Miss Douglas, for the last two months, and it was with reluctance that I relinquished my quest long enough to obey a summons hither," he said, when he began to recover himself a little.

He did not stop to think that she might deem it singular that *he*, almost a stranger, should be searching so earnestly for her.

"How strange," he went on, "that I should have come hither to save you from even worse than what I feared might have happened to you? It was dreadful for you to be there, and my brain grows dizzy with the thought of what must have been if I had not come! Did you know of that perilous shelf? Has no one told you?"

"No, Mr. Dredmond, I only came to Dunforth Castle to-day. I was sad and lonely to-night, and being freed from my

duties, I came out for a stroll in the moonlight. I saw this hill, and heard the dashing of the stream, and thinking a delightful view might be obtained from the top, I clambered up. It was like being suddenly awakened from a beautiful dream, when you seized and bore me from the place."

Adrian shuddered.

"I expected that both of us would be dashed in pieces when I saw the earth giving way, and heard that dreadful noise," she added, in trembling tones.

"Better that, than that I should not have come at all," he returned, passionately.

His tone seemed to recall her suddenly to herself, and she tried to release her hands, which he still held tightly clasped in his.

He was almost unconscious that he still held them, but at the effort she made he looked up at her and saw that her face had grown crimson with blushes, while her eyes dropped shyly beneath his gaze.

"I beg your pardon," he said, releasing them at once, and rising to his feet. "You will think me presuming, but my gratitude that you were safe made me forget myself. Did I understand you that you are staying at the castle?" he asked, changing the subject to relieve his embarrassment.

"I am there for a few days."

"Indeed! and so am I," he replied, much pleased, and forgetting that he had told his grandmother he could not possibly remain longer than over one night. "You are cold," he added, as he saw her shiver; "shall I take you back now to the castle?"

"Thank you; yes," and Brownie arose, but overcome again with weakness, she staggered like a drunken person, and nearly fell.

"Ah! you have not recovered from that fearful shock," Adrian said, as he involuntarily put his arm around her to steady her.

"I think my nerves are not quite settled yet," she returned, looking very white, and vainly trying to pin her shawl with her shaking fingers.

With infinite gentleness he made her lean against him, while he wrapped the shawl close about her graceful figure, and pinned it securely at the throat.

Then, with a tenderness which thrilled her through and through, yet with a courtly deference which made him seem more grand and noble than ever before, he supported her faltering steps down the steep path, and led her back to the castle.

"You have not yet told me, nor will I ask you to-night, how you happened to leave London so suddenly. Wilbur Coolidge told me that I should find you at the Washington," he said, as he drew near the door.

"Yes, I did tell him that I should be there for a few days, but an accident prevented my ever going to the hotel at all. I am now with Lady Ruxley, at her cottage near Vallingham Hall."

"Zounds! She has got right back into that Coolidge nest again, poor thing! I wonder if she knows it, or has seen them yet?" was Adrian's inward comment; then he said, aloud: "If you remain here a few days I shall probably see you again."

Then, as he clasped her hand, he continued, with a smile:

"Now, good-night; and, Miss Douglas, do not go wandering off by yourself again in the night to places you know nothing of."

Again she thrilled at his touch, and the fire leaped into her cheeks at his words.

"I will not," she promised, with a little answering smile, though he saw the tears were dropping from her eyes, as she added: "But, Mr. Dredmond, I have not been able to find words adequate to express my feelings for what you have done for me to-night; but surely you will not deem me ungrateful."

"No, no, dar ——" He nearly said it in spite of himself, but quickly checking the word, he exclaimed: "Great God! how it unmans me even now to think of it; but I pray you go to rest, and try to forget it if you can."

He led her up the steps to a side door, where she could enter unseen, let her in, then wandered away by himself again into the park, his soul stirred to its very depths by the events of the last half hour.

He had found her—his own, his darling, for thus she now seemed to him. He had saved her again from danger, and he longed for the right to protect her all through life.

It galled him exceedingly to know that she was in the vicinity of the Coolidges, who he knew would not hesitate to make it very unpleasant for her, and he resolved, if need be, to use his power to shield her from their insults.

He could at least threaten to reveal Isabel's hypocrisy to Sir Charles, if she became abusive, although his noble nature recoiled from pursuing any such course with a lady (?).

CHAPTER XXIV.

TAKEN BY STORM.

Adrian had been obliged to exert the sternest self-control in order to keep back the wild words which were burning upon his lips for utterance after saving Brownie.

He loved her, he *knew* he loved her, and he longed to pour out the fullness of his heart to her.

But how could he presume to do so, when she was comparatively a stranger to him?

Only twice before had he met her, and he reasoned that it could not be possible that she had any thought of love for him, although he had worshiped her from afar for the last six months.

He felt that he must tell her ere long. He had almost betrayed it to-night, and the hot blood surged into his face as he thought of it, and wondered how she regarded him.

Would she not feel that he was presuming upon the service which he had just rendered her if he should confess it?

And yet, in his heart, he exulted over the event, even while he trembled and grew faint as he realized how near he had come to losing her forever.

The danger and the escape from it had brought them nearer to each other than ever before. She had trusted him, leaned

upon him, and even allowed his arm to clasp her unshrinkingly when she could not stand alone.

And now she was under the same roof with him, and would remain several days, she said.

It seemed too much happiness, after all his discouragements and disappointments in seeking her.

Of course, he would not return to London now; of what use would it be, when the object of his search there was found?

No, he would stay here and win her if he could; and when she was his wife, how proud he would be to introduce her to Isabel Coolidge and her mother as the future Lady of Dunforth!

And Brownie!

Who shall describe the tumult that was in her heart, as she sought Lady Ruxley's apartments?

She could not misinterpret Adrian's manner toward her. Had not he almost called her darling? Had not his every tone and look been fraught with that magnetic influence which could not be mistaken?

Did not his horror, when he had found it was *she* who had been in such peril, bespeak a deeper interest than that of a mere friend?

Ah, yes! and her hands burned with his passionate kisses even now.

How precious—how doubly precious the boon of life would seem to her hereafter, since it had been bestowed upon her by him!

She entered Lady Ruxley's room to bid her "good-night," and see if the maid had done everything to make her comfort-

able; and the old woman marveled at the wondrous beauty which had suddenly crept into her heretofore sad companion's face.

The soft cheeks were flushed with a lovely color, her eyes sparkled with the light of a new dawn in her life, while her scarlet lips were just parted in a tremulous, happy smile, which she had never seen there before.

"You have been out," she said bluntly, though kindly, and eying her keenly.

She never spoke to her gentle companion sharply, as she did to the other members of the family.

"Yes, your ladyship; it was so lovely that I could not stay within, and I knew you would not need me."

"No; the air has done you good, and there is much of beauty around Dunforth Castle. Go as often as you like, if you will only bring me back such a bright face every time."

And again those sharp eyes searched the beautiful countenance.

Brownie colored vividly as she turned away, and a little bird was singing merrily in her heart, and

"As sweet and musical
As bright Apollo's lute!"

The dinner-party had not been very satisfactory either to Lady Randal or Isabel.

Both felt exceedingly uncomfortable all the evening.

The one on account of the wrongs done in the past, memories of which had been so suddenly and rudely aroused, the other, conscious of a wicked sin persisted in, and ever fearful

lest it should become known to others and ruin her prospects in life.

Isabel heaved a sigh of thankfulness when at length she was safe in her own room again, the beautiful blue velvet dress laid aside, and the stolen jewels shut out of sight.

"What a horrid creature that old woman, Lady Ruxley, is," she said, in tones of disgust, to her mother.

"Don't for the world breathe it outside these walls, or it will be the worse for you, Isabel. I can see that she distrusts you now, and if you offend her, she will cut Sir Charles off with a shilling," Mrs. Coolidge returned, in alarm.

"Never fear, mamma, I'll play the game out to the end now. But were you not surprised to discover that Sir Charles and Mr. Dredmond are relatives?"

"Yes, indeed, and not very well pleased, either. I had no idea that Lord Dunforth was his grandfather. It is evident that he knows more about that miserable affair with Miss Douglas than is at all desirable. I am afraid Wilbur let it out to him, he was so angry, and they have been so intimate since. I hope, though, he will hold his tongue, and not tell Sir Charles. I'd give a good deal to know where the girl is now," said Mrs. Coolidge, somewhat anxiously.

* * * * * * *

"I will know my fate this day," said Adrian, the next morning, as he arose from his almost sleepless couch and descended to the breakfast parlor.

For the past six months Brownie had been so continually in his thoughts that she had grown to seem almost a part of himself, and now it seemed to him as if, in the great horror of the

night previous, when they had stood so near to death, and together had caught a glimpse, so to speak, of the darkness and gloom of mysterious eternity, it seemed, I say, as if they had tacitly acknowledged and felt that they belonged to each other.

"How now," said his grandfather, as he entered the room; "*must* you be off to-day? I was hoping that you would spend several weeks with us."

"I'm sure I cannot see what there is so important to call you back to London," put in Lady Dunforth, reproachfully.

"Do you take it so much to heart? Well, then, suppose I compromise the matter, and say that I will remain a few days," Adrian replied, laughingly, though he colored a conscious crimson as he altered his plans.

His lordship gave him a searching glance, as if he did not exactly understand this change; he had been so positive last night about returning.

Lady Dunforth, however, was delighted, and other guests entering at that moment, she imparted the good news, and then all sat down to breakfast.

Adrian was on the watch all day for Brownie, but late hours did not agree with Lady Ruxley, and she did not rise until very late. Then being in rather a more exacting mood than usual, she kept her companion in constant attendance upon her all day.

It was not until late in the afternoon that Brownie was free to take a stroll by herself; then, her ladyship having fallen into a dose, she donned her hat and shawl and stole out.

She had a strange desire to visit again the spot where she had

so nearly lost her life, and view by daylight the havoc which had been wrought.

She felt that the sweetest, and yet the most dreadful associations, would ever be connected with the place.

Walking rapidly, she soon gained the top of the hill, and, turning from the narrow path, she ere long stood upon the precipice where the great shelf of earth had crumbled away.

She could see where the old crack had been, and where the earth had newly broken away; and as she looked down into the abyss below, where the trees, rocks, and earth were fast being swallowed up and borne away by the fierce action of the waters, cold chills crept over her whole frame, while she silently lifted her heart in thankfulness to Him who had sent that brave deliverer to her rescue.

"Strange that he should be here! Strange that he should have saved me a second time," she murmured to herself, and the rosy color flashed over her beautiful face, as she recalled that scene upon the boat in connection with the events of the night previous.

She could not forget the clinging clasp of his arms; she could not forget his upturned, anxious face, as he dropped upon his knees, nor the burning, passionate kisses which he had pressed upon her hands; the horror in his voice when he realized that it was *she* who had been in such danger; the intense thankfulness which quivered in his tones at her deliverance, and the pathos with which he had said it would have been better for them both to have perished beneath that falling mass than that he had not come to save her.

He had told her, too, of his long and anxious search for her

in London; and now she lived over again, every moment, and recalled it all, with that beautiful color deepening upon her cheek, and those lovely eyes glowing with a deep tenderness and joy.

She knew it could only be accounted for in one way; *he loved her!* Her whole being thrilled with the thought.

A strange, rapturous joy surged through her heart, for she knew, despite the difference in their position—for she had heard that he would one day inherit a title, although she had no idea that he was connected with Lord Dunforth—that it was an honorable and deathless love which he bore her.

She would as soon have doubted her own purity as his manliness and truth. And she? Did she love him in return?

Before she had time to analyze her own feelings, she became conscious of a presence near her, though she had heard no step, and looking up, she beheld the object of her thoughts at her side, regarding her with grave, earnest eyes.

"Are you fascinated by the horror of this place, Miss Douglas?" Adrian asked, holding out his hand to her.

"I came to see by daylight from what I had been saved," she replied, coloring vividly as she laid her own within it.

"It is even more dreadful than it seemed in the night," he said, shuddering, as he looked below and took in the dizzy depth, while his clasp grew stronger over the little hand, as if he feared to let it go.

"This place," he resumed after a moment, "has been regarded with dread for years. I can remember when I was a little boy of seeing the smallest crack in the earth here, and I was told never to step near it. Every year, as the trees and

shrubs growing upon it have become larger, the seam has widened and deepened, until the crash has been expected for a long time. I suppose our extra weight upon it last night was all that was needed to complete the dreadful work. I am glad, though, that it is over with, for everybody has been in suspense about it for so long; but—but do you know, darling, that if it had buried *you* beneath its cruel weight that the world would have been a blank to me to-day?"

He paused a moment, just glancing at her, his face growing pale and anxious with his emotion; then he went on, rapidly:

"You know now, dear, what I want to say to you. I love you—I love you, my darling, and I want you for my own, my cherished wife.

"I fear you will think me presuming," he hastened to say, as he saw the rich color flash over cheek, neck, and even to the tips of her delicate fingers, "for you have only met me two or three times; but you cannot know how, for the last six months, I have sought you continually, this love growing in my heart all the while.

"Yes," he added, as she gave a slight start of surprise, "I met you first last September, though you were not conscious of the fact, and I meant then to make your acquaintance. But your aunt died, and you went away somewhere, and I, deeply disappointed, lost sight of you entirely. You can judge of my surprise and pleasure when you came aboard the steamer at New York, although you cannot judge of my feelings when you stumbled, and I caught and held you, just a moment, in my arms. I had been thinking of you continually; your bright face dwelt in my heart like a picture, but at that moment

I became conscious that you, and you alone, could make life worth the living to me.

"I resolved then that I would know you before the voyage was finished; but you were sick all the time, and I only caught glimpses of you when they bore you from your state-room to the coach. Then I saw you in London at the opera, and the long-desired introduction took place. I resolved to cultivate the acquaintance, and called at Mr. Coolidge's the day you—you went away."

Adrian hesitated as he said this; he could not forget the dreadful things Isabel had told him, although he knew they were every word untrue.

And she, in the midst of her confusion at his avowal, could not repress a smile at the thought of *his* calling upon *her* at the Coolidge's, and wondered how the fact had been received by the haughty Isabel.

"They told me you had gone," he resumed, "though they could not or would not tell me where. Afterward young Coolidge said that I would find you at the Washington. I haunted the hotel for a week, and I have searched the city over and over for you since. But, dearest," he said, clasping the little hand closer, "I have found you now, and can you give me the one precious boon I crave—your priceless love?"

He bent eagerly toward her, his noble, handsome face flushed and hopeful, for her attitude was one of sweet and modest confusion, and she had not even sought to withdraw the hand he was holding.

"Will you, Brownie?" he pleaded, softly.

She flashed one quick look at him from her beautiful eyes

as he called her that, and he saw in their clear depths all that he wished or hoped.

She loved him! Her soul answered to his, and clasping her close to his heart, he murmured:

"You are mine, darling—I have won you by the mighty power of my silent, magnetic love, and you will be my wife?"

She lifted her head, which had been resting against his bosom, quickly at these last words, and said, with drooping lashes and quivering lips:

"Mr. Dredmond, you have taken me by storm."

"Yes, and I mean to hold you," he interrupted, gayly, as he noticed her excessive embarrassment; then added, more earnestly: "Brownie, *do* you, *can* you love me?"

She smiled faintly at his first words, then with modest frankness gave him the honest answer which she knew was his due.

"If I am truthful, I must confess that my heart does respond to yours; but knowing so little of you, I should have deemed it unmaidenly to have confessed it, even to myself."

"But you *do* confess it now—you *do* love me?" he interrupted again, eagerly, and impatient for a more definite reply.

"Yes," she whispered.

"And you will be my wife?" he asked, as his lips met hers.

"Yes, God willing," in tones of solemn sweetness.

"Darling, God has given you to me; I acknowledge the giver as I take the gift. From that first moment when I met you in the Art Gallery in Philadelphia until now this mighty love has been growing within me."

"In the Art Gallery?" questioned Brownie, with a puzzled look.

"Yes, when your friend, Miss Huntington, met with such a series of accidents."

"Oh, was that you with Mr. Gordon?" she demanded, her face dimpling at the remembrance, and she eagerly searched his face. "I remember now; it has haunted me like a strange dream ever since I met you on the boat, where I had seen you before. Now it all comes back to me," she said.

"I found something that day which belongs to you, but not in season to return it to you then," Adrian said.

He took from his pocket as he spoke the elegant sleeve-button, which he had always carried with him since.

Brownie exclaimed, joyously, as she saw it:

"Oh, how glad I am to get it—I never thought to see it again; and you have had it all this time?"

"Yes, darling—*my* Brownie—how I have longed to say it—and I vowed then that I would only yield it up into your own little hands."

"It belonged to auntie once," she explained, "and there are associations connected with it which make it very dear to me."

"And now come to yonder rock and sit down. I want to know all that has happened to you since you left the Coolidges; there has been some mystery connected with it which I could never understand," Adrian said, leading her to a sheltered seat, and sitting down beside her.

And Brownie, feeling that she was now no longer alone, but that instead she had a host in him to battle for her, poured forth all the story of her wrongs about the jewels, and the abuse and insult which she had received from Isabel and her mother.

That story, however, we must leave for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXV

RETROSPECTIVE.

The reader has doubtless surmised before this, that it was Brownie's voice which had so startled Isabel Coolidge, and that it was she whom she had seen assisting Lady Ruxley into the house, as she and her lover passed the villa on their way back to Vallingham Hall.

Isabel had asked Lady Randal, on her return, what the name of Lady Ruxley's companion was; but upon being told that it was Mabel Dundas, her fears were quieted, and she thought no more of the matter at that time.

We must now go back to that day when Brownie, in her despair and desolation, bade farewell to Wilbur and drove away from the Coolidge mansion.

It was her intention to go directly to the Washington, and there await, for a few days at least, whatever destiny might send her.

But this plan was overruled in a way she had not thought of

The man who drove the cab was more than half intoxicated, although he had managed to conceal the fact from Wilbur, who, had he not been so bound up in his own misery, and filled with indignation against his mother, would have noticed it immediately.

As it was, the poor girl rode away, all unconscious of approaching danger, and of the suffering and fright through which she was about to pass.

The man drove very carelessly, and upon suddenly and heedlessly turning a corner, he ran into a heavily-loaded team before he could check the speed of his horses. More by hit than by any good wit, he turned them quickly aside, and the cab was almost miraculously disengaged from the other vehicle; but the animals had now become unmanageable from excessive fright. They gave a sudden leap into the air, then bounded forward in a mad and furious race.

The cabby was thrown from his seat into the gutter, and in turning another corner, the carriage was upset. Now, wholly beside themselves, the horses kicked themselves free from the *debris*, and plunged out of sight, leaving poor Brownie in a state of insensibility, buried beneath the ruins.

The accident had happened in a quiet, aristocratic street of the city; consequently there were few to witness it, and the young girl escaped the curious gaze of the crowd which always gather about any such event in the more frequented portions.

The massive door of a grand house soon swung open, and an old lady of over eighty, very peculiar in appearance (for she was bent nearly double, and walked with a cane), appeared, attended by the gray-haired butler of the house.

"Go and bring her in instantly, James," she was saying, when another woman came forward and seemed to protest against the order in a very emphatic manner.

"I tell you it's inhuman, Helen, to let her lie there, to be

carried off to some hospital by the police," cried the old woman, in shrill, almost angry tones.

"But, aunt, the house is full now; and if she is badly injured it will not do to move her from here after she has been once attended to."

"I don't care if there are five hundred in the house; that girl shall not be left there to be carried off by the police, I tell you. James, go bring her in this instant! Get some one to help you, and take her up to my bedroom."

"But, aunt——"

"Hold your tongue, Helen. You were always hard-hearted as adamant. Go along, I say!" And she flourished her cane about the grave butler's ears in a way to make him move more quickly to execute her orders than was his wont.

He beckoned to two under-servants, and together they proceeded to the overturned carriage, where Brownie could be seen lying prone against the window, her white face upturned and motionless.

They extricated her, and bore her into an upper room, where, in the presence of the brusque and energetic old woman, she was kindly ministered unto, while awaiting the arrival of the family physician.

It was a long time before she came to herself, and then only to relapse into repeated faintings, which alarmed them greatly.

The physician, after a thorough examination, could discover no serious injuries, excepting that her left arm was broken below the elbow. She had also several severe bruises, and the physician feared there might be some internal injuries which caused the faintings.

He set the bones, and did what he could for her, and then waited for time to do the rest.

For three days she continued very ill, being feverish and somewhat delirious, but after that she began to mend rapidly, and the doctor concluded that there were no internal injuries, and that the fainting had been caused by the fright and general shock to the system, and said if inflammation did not set into her arm she would now do nicely.

At the end of a week she was able to sit up, and began to wonder where she was, and what would happen to her next.

Evidently she could not have fallen into better hands, for she was surrounded by every luxury imaginable, and upon questioning the servant who attended her, she was told that she was in the house of Lady Randal.

She wondered why her ladyship did not come in to see her, and then sighed to think that she was only a poor, friendless waif, who had been picked out of the streets and ministered unto for charity's sake.

But one day, upon awaking from a long and refreshing sleep, she found the queerest-looking old lady bending over her and scrutinizing her closely. She was nearly bent double, and held a cane in her hand. She uttered a low grunt as Brownie opened her large brown eyes, giving her a surprised look, and then asked, in a sharp, though not unkindly, tone:

"Who are you? What's your name?"

"My name is Douglas," replied Brownie, quietly, her pale face flushing slightly at the blunt question.

"Eh? What? Oh! Dundas," returned the deformed creature, twisting her neck to get a better view of the delicate face.

She was evidently hard of hearing, and did not catch the name correctly; but she continued:

"And what's your other name?"

"Mehetabel," the young girl said, with her usual quiet smile whenever she pronounced the obnoxious cognomen.

"Ah! Mabel," replied the old woman, only seeing the motion of her lips, and catching the last syllables. "Mabel Dundas! That is a good-sounding name. Now, how old are you?"

Brownie was upon the point of correcting the mistake regarding her name, when she checked herself.

"What matters it," she breathed, with a sad sigh, "whether I am Mehetabel Douglas or Mabel Dundas? It will be all the same to her, and perhaps help to shield me from my enemies."

"I am nearly nineteen," she replied to the question.

"What? I'm not always so hard of hearing, but I've got a cold to-day. How old did you say you are?"

"Nearly nineteen," Brownie repeated, speaking louder.

"Do you suffer much?"

"Not very much."

"Where are your friends?"

"I have none," and the sad, sweet eyes filled with tears.

"Humph! that's bad for a pretty face like yours. What do you do for a living?"

"Teach."

"Teach what?"

"Almost anything, excepting the higher classics."

"Ah! indeed! and only nineteen! Perhaps you are one of those reduced gentlewomen, who go out governessing, and

pretend to know *everything!*" snapped the old woman, with a sneer.

Probably she had been taken in sometime during her life by some such person as she described, which accounted for her scorn.

"No, madam; I *pretend* to nothing. I have a *good* education, therefore teach for a living, and am only a poor girl without home or friends."

Brownie's cheeks were very red now, but her dignity would have done credit to the highest lady in the land.

The strange woman chuckled audibly, nodded her head two or three times, as if much amused, and then went on with her catechising:

"Do you read French?"

"Yes, madam," replied the young girl, inwardly resenting the woman's brusque manner, yet feeling bound to reverence her gray head.

"And German?"

"Yes, madam."

"Can you play the piano, and sing?"

"I can."

"Have you an engagement now?"

"No, madam."

"Are you desirous of obtaining a situation?"

"I am."

"Can you produce the 'best of references?'"

This question was also accompanied by a sneer.

"I cannot, madam. I have only my qualifications and my

own word to recommend me," Brownie answered, with a good deal of spirit.

Again the old woman chuckled, and distorted her neck to look at her, in a way which made Brownie fear she would dislocate it.

"Where were you last?" she demanded.

Evidently the old lady possessed authority in the house, or she would not have assumed this manner toward her. She was very richly dressed, too, and despite her deformity, had the appearance of nobility about her.

Brownie tried to hide her indignation at being so persistently questioned, for she had been kindly treated, having received every care and kindness, although as yet she was unconscious how much of it was due her present tormentor.

"I taught in an American family," she at last replied.

"Ah! Came over with them, didn't you? And you are an American, too, aren't you?" she asked, with a searching look.

Brownie nodded her head wearily; she was becoming very nervous.

"What was the name of the family, and what did they dismiss you for?"

This was going a little too far, and assuming too much.

"Pardon me, madam," Brownie answered, with proud dignity. "I do not understand your motive in interrogating me thus, and prefer not to reply to any more questions. I will simply say, however, that I was not dismissed from my position, but being unkindly treated, I came away of my own accord."

"Good! good! I like that! Nobody can set their heel upon your neck! You are not fond of the inquisition either,

nor afraid to say so. You've got pluck, and I like it; but I'm an old woman, and always have my own way wherever I am. I'll go now, though, for you look tired; but I shall come to see you again." And the strange character, after twisting her neck to get another view of Brownie's fair face, hobbled from the room, striking her cane upon the floor with a vigorous thump at every step, and nodding her head and muttering to herself all the way out.

Brownie fell to weeping passionately as soon as she was gone. Her sharp, blunt questions had brought back so forcibly the stern realities of life, and she felt so friendless and forlorn, not knowing which way to turn next.

But she felt better after the shower, and began to lay her plans for the future.

The next day she was awakened from her nap the same as on the previous day, and was greeted by that same low grunt as she opened her eyes.

She had no idea how long the woman had been gazing at her, nor how she had entered the room, for she had heard neither the opening nor the shutting of a door, nor the thumping of that cane across the floor.

She held in her left hand to-day a delicate vase of fretted silver, in which there was a single stalk of hyacinths, with a few sprays of feathery heath.

"Better to-day?" she questioned, briefly.

Brownie smiled a little, as she answered in the affirmative. She saw that the keen gray eyes had a softer, kindlier gleam in them than they had yesterday.

"Arm pain you much?"

"No, madam, thank you; it is very comfortable to-day."

"Do you like flowers?" and she held out the vase to her.

Brownie sat up, her lovely face flushing all over with delight, and put her hand out to receive it.

"You are very kind. They seem like a ray of sunshine after a cold and dismal storm," she said, bending over them to inhale their fragrance.

"Humph! it takes mighty little to make some people chipper," the old woman returned, bluntly; yet there was a note of satisfaction in her shrill voice, as if Brownie's appreciation pleased her.

Then she asked:

"Are you getting stronger? Are you able to walk about the room?"

"Oh, yes; I am quite strong to-day, and have been thinking I must go away soon."

"What for? Aren't you comfortable?" and the old lady spoke more sharply than usual.

"Yes, indeed; too comfortable, I'm afraid. But then I am depending on strangers, and I ought to be looking out for myself," Brownie said, her cheeks crimsoning with embarrassment.

"What could you do with your arm in a sling, I should like to know?" her visitor said, contemptuously.

"That would not hinder my teaching, and I ought to be at work."

"Ahem! you'd like me to think you are one of the industrious kind, wouldn't you?" the old woman said, grimly.

Evidently she did not like anything which seemed like self-praise.

"Oh, no," Brownie answered, with a mischievous smile; "I assure you I do not love drudgery a bit better than other people; but when one has not a penny excepting what one earns, it is necessary to bestir one's self."

She began to understand this strange, antiquated being, and to see that beneath her rough, blunt exterior there lay a kindly although somewhat eccentric nature.

The little vase of hyacinths and heath had revealed a great deal; it was a delicate attention, which only a kind heart would have prompted.

Again she chuckled, bobbed her head, and peered into the young, sweet face, which had grown so much brighter since she came in this time.

"Well, if you want to work, and can walk a few steps, come with me. I'll take you at your word, and set you a task right away."

Much amused, and wondering what was coming next, Brownie arose with alacrity, for she had grown weary of being shut up in one room, and longed for a change.

The old woman led the way half across the room, then stopping short and turning suddenly around, she said:

"Perhaps you'd like to know who I am, since I've managed to find out so much about you and your affairs. I'm Lady Ruxley, and I'm aunt to Lady Randal, in whose house you are. She's a hard-hearted creature—Helen is, but she can't come it over me; no, no, not until I lose more of my wits than I have yet," she concluded, with a triumphant chuckle.

Lady Ruxley! Lady Ruxley! Where had she heard that name before? Brownie wondered

It sounded familiar, and her thoughts went leaping back into the past.

Then all at once it came to her with a force which made her feel faint and sick, and she caught her breath with almost a sob.

Lady Ruxley was that woman at whose ball in London, more than forty years ago, that tragedy in her aunt's life had occurred, and Lady Randal was, without a doubt, the hard-hearted Helen, and that same Helen Capel whose cruel plotting and intrigue had ruined the life of Miss Mehetabel Douglas.

And she had been receiving, and was still receiving, such heavy obligations from the hands of that wicked woman!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LITTLE MATTER OF BUSINESS.

"What's the matter? You are not strong enough to walk! Go back and sit down," commanded Lady Ruxley, as she saw the young girl first flush a deep crimson, and then grow white as a ghost.

But she quickly recovered herself.

"Thank you, but I am perfectly able to go; I was dizzy for a moment, though it has passed now," she returned, quietly, although a tumult of feelings was raging in her bosom.

Giving her another searching glance, her ladyship passed on, and instead of going out at the door, as Brownie expected she would do, she proceeded toward the opposite side of the room, where a set of heavy satin damask curtains hung suspended from a richly-gilded cornice.

Brownie supposed that they concealed a window, but sweeping them aside, her guide conducted her through a lofty archway into a small vestibule, lighted from above through richly-stained panels of glass to another archway also concealed by curtains.

Passing through this she ushered her companion into the sunniest, pleasantest, airiest room in the world.

It was a sort of parlor, library, and music-room combined.

and contained every comfort and luxury which the human heart could suggest.

Leading from this large room was a smaller one, in which Brownie caught sight of a narrow bed simply draped in white.

She afterward learned that the strange old woman, out of the abundant tenderness of her heart for her in her dangerous condition, had given up her own luxurious chamber to her, and slept upon this small couch in an ante-room.

"Sit down," said Lady Ruxley, indicating by a motion of her head a tempting chair standing near a marble table covered with richly bound books.

Brownie obeyed, while her ladyship seated herself in another opposite.

"There," she said, when, by an ingenious contrivance, she had tipped the chair back so that she could look at her without twisting her neck; "now I'll tell you what I want of you. Three weeks ago I sent away my companion because she neglected me. I suppose it *was* dull staying with such an old drybones as I am; and I've had no one since to read to me, or do anything for my amusement. Now, if you want something to do, won't you please read me something from that 'English Review?'"

"With pleasure," Brownie replied, her pale face brightening again with the thought of contributing thus to the poor lonely old woman's comfort.

It seemed almost like the old times with her own auntie, only it would have appeared more real if Lady Ruxley had not been so blunt and sharp, but a little more lovable, like Miss Mehetabel.

She read an hour, in clear, distinct tones, which, although her ladyship was hard of hearing, she had no difficulty in catching every word.

"That was reading worth listening to," she said, heaving a sigh of appreciation. "Now put the book aside, and rest a while."

"I am not weary; let me read you something else," she answered.

"No, no; I'll not listen to any more now; but if you do not mind, I'd like you to sit with me a while longer."

"Yes, certainly, if you wish."

"Nobody cares for an old mummy like me," (how Brownie wished she would not call herself such horrid names), "and I do get lonely staying by myself all the time; though the time was when there were few who were not glad to seek the society of Lady Ruxley. Minnett, my maid, is no company, and I've not been able to find any one who was willing to be companion to a deaf old woman.

"They try to be polite," she went on, garrulously, "to me when I go down into the drawing-room, because they know I'm rich, and they think it won't do to cross me; but I know my room is better than my company. Nobody but Charles cares for his old aunt; he's Lady Randal's son, and as good as gold. *He* never pokes fun because I am so unfortunate as to form a right angel with my body, and have to twist my neck like a turtle in its shell when I want to see anybody. *He's* always civil, and would give me his arm out to dinner as gallantly as to the handsomest belle in the kingdom. *He* believes in the old proverb about 'honoring the hoary head,' which is

more than most young people nowadays do. How is it, young woman—do *you* like old folks?"

She had run on in a rambling sort of way, but as she asked this question, she turned to Brownie, and eyed her keenly.

"I had a dear aunt, who was all the friend I had in the world since I was a little baby. She was both father and mother to me, and I shall always feel tenderly toward old people for her sake," Brownie replied, the quick tears springing to her eyes.

"Is she dead?"

"Yes; she died the fifth of last September."

"Was she old, and ugly, and withered like me?"

Poor Brownie! it was a hard question, remembering so vividly as she did Miss Mehetabel's fair, lovely face, set in its frame-work of clustering silvery curls.

The comparison was not favorable, to say the least, to this antedeluvian before her.

She flushed with embarrassment as she gently replied:

"All old people grow wrinkled, you know, and her hair was much whiter than yours."

Lady Ruxley chuckled merrily over this non-committal answer.

"Young woman, you are as 'wise as a serpent, and as harmless as a dove,' and I'm of the opinion that your aunt might have thought considerable of you. What was her name?"

"I was named for her," the young girl replied, evasively.

"Mabel Dundas. It is a pretty name; I like it."

And the queer old lady looked as if she liked the owner of it, too.

"Do you play chess?" Brownie asked, to change the subject, and glancing toward an elegant chess-table of ebony inlaid in squares with pearl and gold.

"Yes, yes; do you know the game?" returned Lady Ruxley, eagerly.

"I used to play with aunt some; perhaps it would pass away an hour if we should play a game."

Her ladyship chuckled and nodded her head contentedly, and then started up to arrange the table.

"Please keep your seat, Lady Ruxley, and allow me to wait upon you," Brownie said, rising quickly.

She wheeled the little table close to her ladyship's chair with her right hand, and dextrously arranged the men.

Then she drew up her own chair, and the contest began.

Two hours passed rapidly while engaged in this fascinating game.

Brownie checkmated her opponent the first two games, but losing (?) her queen the third crippled her, and Lady Ruxley won.

"You lost your queen; but if I beat, *I* want to beat!" she said, sharply, although there was a kindly gleam in her eyes which belied her harsh words, and Brownie smiled to see how quickly she had detected her ruse.

The next morning, after the servant who waited upon Brownie had attended to all her wants, and left her, there came a rap upon her door. The next moment a handsome woman of about fifty entered. Brownie arose, bowed courteously, and remained standing till she was addressed.

"Miss Dundas," the lady said, "I must apologize to you

for any seeming neglect in not coming to see you before, but I have a house full of company; but I have given orders that you should want for nothing. I am Lady Randal, and I have come to have a few moments' conversation with you."

She seated herself, and motioned for Brownie to do the same, then resumed:

"You have had quite a serious accident, and I am glad to see you are better. Are you quite comfortable, and do the servants attend you properly?" and she put up her eye-glasses to inspect the stranger.

"Thank you, I have been very kindly cared for, and am very grateful for the good Samaritan's charity which has provided for my necessities," Brownie answered, trying to speak heartily, although she felt the greatest repugnance toward this woman, who she believed was guilty of so much wrong.

She had a cold, false eye, and a cunning, cruel expression about her handsome mouth.

She was just the kind of a woman to ruin the life of any one who stood in her way, Brownie thought.

She laughed lightly but disagreeably at the young girl's words.

"Oh, I do not claim any merit whatever regarding your comfort or necessities. My house was full, and at first I thought it would be impossible to take you in, but Lady Ruxley, who is very eccentric and willful, insisted upon it, and gave up her own chamber for your accommodation, she sleeping meanwhile in her maid's room."

Brownie's fair face grew scarlet, as she listened to this, and was made to feel, by the indelicate explanation, that Lady Randal, at least, had regarded her in the light of an intruder.

It explained to her, too, what she had at first considered singular—that the rooms should be connected by archways and curtains instead of doors.

"I regret exceedingly," she returned, with dignity, "that I should have put an aged lady like Lady Ruxley to such inconvenience. I laid my plans yesterday to go to some hotel as soon as I should be able, and remain until I fully recover the use of my arm. If you will allow one of your servants to order a carriage for me, I will put my plan into execution at once."

"No, no, Miss Dundas, that would never do at all, and Aunt Ruxley would berate me soundly if she knew I had told you this. She is a very queer woman, as doubtless you discovered yesterday. She will not be crossed in anything, and when her mind is once made up, you can no more move her than you could one of the seven hills of Rome. She saw the cab in which you were, when it was overturned, from one of the drawing-room windows, and immediately hobbled to the door where she ordered James, the butler, to bring you in. Since then she has paid you a visit every day, although she tells me that you did not discover it until the day before yesterday, when you awoke and found her standing over you. But," continued the woman, who had never once taken her eyes from the fair young face before her, and had read its every expression with a boldness which made her odious, "I did not come to tell you this—I came upon a little matter of business."

She paused a moment, and Brownie wondered what business she could have with her.

"Aunt Ruxley has taken a great shine to you, so to speak,"

she resumed, "and has commissioned me to ask you if you would be willing to remain with her as her companion? Wait, if you please, until I get through, Miss Dundas, before you decide," she said, as Brownie looked up in surprise, and then went on, as if she supposed the young girl possessed of no feeling or delicacy: "I do not approve of the plan myself; I never believed in engaging any one in this way, for she says you have no recommendation or credentials beyond your own word. But she has set her heart upon it, and seems to think you will be willing to remain. It is very difficult to get any one of the right sort who is willing to stay and do for her what she requires, on account of her peculiarities. We have tried several during the last two years. Now, if you think you would like the place, and would exert yourself to please her, we will overlook your lack of credentials, and I think we can arrange to give you the situation. Your salary would be fifty pounds a year. Of course we do not expect," she hastened to add, "that you can do very much until your arm gets strong, and we will make every allowance for that."

Brownie was disgusted with the woman's coarseness, and felt more like refusing the offer than accepting it, but what could she do?

It seemed like flying in the face of Providence to reject it.

She had no credentials, and no good family having children would engage her without, and she knew she was likely to fare no better, if as well, if she returned to her native land, unless she should acknowledge she had failed in her great undertaking, and fall back upon Mr. Conrad's offer to give her a home.

She was convinced that, with all her eccentricities, Lady Ruxley was kind at heart, and if she were treated with proper respect and consideration she believed she would not prove a hard mistress, and fifty pounds a year would do very well to begin with, and might be a stepping-stone to a larger salary in the future.

So, after thinking the matter over carefully, she decided to accept Lady Randal's offer.

"Does Lady Ruxley remain in town most of the year?" she asked, before giving her answer.

"Oh, no. I ought to have mentioned that we all leave town in a few weeks for our country seat, in Kent County, where Lady Ruxley has a house of her own, preferring to live alone rather than endure the noise and confusion of Vallingham Hall. Do you object to the country?"

"Oh, no, I like it."

This intelligence relieved Brownie greatly, for she felt as if she could scarcely endure to live in the same house with this woman.

"It may be a little lonely for you at first," Lady Randal added, "but aunt frequently pays a visit at the Hall, for she likes to know what is going on in the world, I assure you, if she does live alone with her servants most of the time."

"I will accept this position, Lady Randal, and if I can make Lady Ruxley's life more pleasant than it has been I shall be very thankful," Brownie said, gravely, yet a little proudly.

She did not fancy her visitor's patronizing, almost insolent manner, and inwardly resented her bold, fixed stare.

"Very well, then we will call the matter settled," Lady Ran-

dal replied, rising, and infinitely relieved that she had been able to secure a companion for her troublesome aunt, though she thought the girl a "proud minx."

She left her with a cool good-morning, and the young girl seemed to breathe freer the moment the door closed after her.

* * * * * *

"Can you be happy with such a blunt, cross-grained old woman as I am?" asked Lady Ruxley, when she next saw Brownie.

"It does not always do to judge people by their exterior," she replied, smiling, and then she blushed, fearing she had admitted too much.

"What do you mean by that?" and the keen eyes searched her.

"I mean that though you have a blunt way of addressing people, I think you have a very kind heart underneath it all, else you would never have befriended a poor stray waif like me in the way you did. I am sorry you should have been put to so much inconvenience," and Brownie's sweet lips trembled.

"Pshaw! child, you were too pretty to be left lying there in the gutter for anybody to pick up and carry off. I suppose Helen ran on about the inconvenience of the thing, and she was a fool to tell you about it," the old lady answered, somewhat disturbed.

A month later they were settled in that gem of a villa, near Vallingham Hall.

Brownie had fully recovered, and her arm was getting stronger every day, so that she ventured now to use it daily to entertain her strange employer, who was very fond of music.

She really grew quite attached to the old lady when she became better acquainted with her, and found her, with all her oddities, a much more congenial companion than either Mrs. Coolidge or Isabel had been.

She did sometimes grow weary, and long for the sight of a young face, but Lady Ruxley's library table was covered with all the first-class periodicals of the day; while she was continually ordering music from London for her.

She read a great deal, and practiced several hours a day, so that the time slipped by until Lady Randal and her family came down to Vallingham Hall, the advent of which was to open a new era in Brownie Douglas' life!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"AND YOU WILL BE MY WIFE!"

The events contained in the last two chapters Brownie related in substance to Adrian, as they sat together upon the rock where he had first discovered who she was the night previous.

She told him also of that unfortunate scene with Wilbur Coolidge in the library, and of the abuse and insult which Isabel and her mother heaped upon her upon discovering the young man's preference for her.

"I knew from the first they abused you, darling, and Wilbur told me something regarding the jewels, but I never dreamed of anything so wicked as this. It is all over with now, however—you shall have your property back again, and Miss Isabel shall suffer for her superciliousness. I suppose you know she is engaged to Sir Charles Randal," Adrian said, when she had concluded.

"Sir Charles Randal! No!" replied Brownie, growing pale at the intelligence.

"What! you have been an inmate of their family so long, and not know of this important circumstance."

"I saw but very little of the family while I was at their house in London. I was with Lady Ruxley constantly, and scarcely went out until we came down to West Malling, which we did a

month before the family at the Hall; and we have not seen much of them since, but live very quietly and pleasantly at the villa."

"Lady Ruxley is a very peculiar woman. Do you not find her so?" Adrian asked, an amused look in his eyes.

"Yes; and yet there are very few people who really know her. She is kindness itself at heart."

"She is very rich, too."

"Yes, so I have heard; and that Sir Charles will have all her wealth at her death."

"I suppose he will."

"I am told he is a very fine young man, and I am so sorry that—that——"

Brownie stopped short and colored.

She was about to say she regretted his engagement to Isabel, but she would not speak against her, notwithstanding all her abuse of her.

"That he has been so taken in," Adrian finished for her. "It is too bad, for Charles really deserves a better fate," he added, with a clouded brow.

"By the way," and Brownie glanced up mischievously, "do you know that that honor was intended for *you*?"

"I surmised as much from certain circumstances which came to my knowledge," he replied, with a scornful curl of his fine lips. "But," he added, a moment after, as he gathered her close in his arms, "she will find that there was one who could look beneath the surface. My darling—my darling—my pure little pearl! what is she compared with you?"

"And yet, it may be, that beneath all her cruelty and hard-

ness she has a heart susceptible to good; we will not judge her too severely," Brownie said, gently.

"Little charity," Adrian replied, tenderly. "I hope, for her own sake, that it may be so; but, at all events, I shall be very proud to introduce you, whom she has so abused and maligned, as my wife—when shall it be, my Brownie?"

"Don't you think your questions are getting altogether too pointed and practical, considering the length of our acquaintance?" she retorted, a mischievous, happy gleam in her eye, but with a face that was "a rosy red."

"But, dear, you are so alone in the world."

"No, I am no longer alone, Ad—Mr. Dredmond."

"Ah, you spoiled that, darling," he said, reproachfully.

"Well, then, *Adrian*, since I have your love, I shall never feel lonely again, let come what will," and she lifted her trusting eyes to his.

Ah, but she did not know what she was saying!

"But, my darling, now that I have found you and won you, I want to rivet the bonds which unite us, lest some other calamity befall you," he said, bending his lips to hers.

"But—but Lady Ruxley will be very much disappointed."

"I presume so; I should be somewhat surprised if she was not. But is Lady Ruxley of more consequence than some one else whom you know?' the young man asked, with mock humility, as, placing one finger beneath her chin, he raised the blushing face so that he could look into the lovely eyes.

"No; oh, no—but——" with a little smile.

"But what, dear?" questioned her lover, tenderly, as he saw the sensitive lips quivering.

"But, Adrian, I may as well say it first as last—I shrink from the ordeal which I know must come."

"What ordeal?" he asked, very gravely.

"I have heard that you are allied to a noble house—that you are some time to inherit great possessions and a title, though just what that title is I know not; and I fear that your proud kinsmen will scorn the idea of a poor, friendless waif like me becoming *your* wife!"

"Who informed you that I was heir to such 'great expectations,'" he asked, with a quiet smile.

"It was spoken of often by Mrs. Coolidge and her daughter."

"And do *you* deem yourself unworthy to be my wife *on account of your poverty?*"

"No!" and the bright head was lifted proudly now, the lovely eyes glowed with a fire which told that, despite her lack of wealth and position, she considered herself the equal of the proudest in the land.

"What then? Suppose you and I were suddenly to change places, would you deem me to be unworthy to be your husband because I had lost my wealth?"

"No! I should be proud——"

He stopped her lips with tender kisses.

"And I, my darling, should be proud to call you my wife were you the lowliest-born in all England. But you are not; you are my equal in birth and station, and it is only an accident which has placed you where any one is liable to be. A man often misses his expectations, and I am only plain Adrian Dred-

mond as yet; surely you are not afraid of me, if you are of those whom you choose to term my high-born kinsmen."

Brownie nestled closer to him as she replied, with dignity:

"I am *afraid* of no one, yet one naturally shrinks from bringing contempt upon one whom one loves, and you know the ways of the world, Adrian."

She was getting used to speaking his name now, and it thrilled him whenever it dropped from her lips.

"*You* never can bring contempt upon me. The world may say what it pleases—and I warn you it will not dare say very much—you and I are the parties most interested in this matter, and since I am of age, and capable of choosing my own wife, I think we will call no one else into the consultation," he said, decisively.

Brownie laughed at his way of settling the matter.

"You have not answered me yet, darling," he added, a moment after; "you have given yourself to me?"

"Yes, Adrian, I am proud to give myself to you?"

"And you will be my wife?" drawing her closer.

"Yes."

"Whenever I say?"

She lifted her eyes again to read his, but their light dazzled her, and with her own lashes drooping shyly upon her crimson cheeks, she murmured;

"Whenever you will, dear."

There was a silence of several minutes, during which only the dashing of the river beneath them and the beating of their own hearts could be distinguished. Brownie felt trustfully, peacefully happy, and that the trials and struggles to which she

had been subjected during the past six months were over, while Adrian's manly heart beat with pride and joy over the lovely bride he had won.

At length he whispered :

"Then, my Brownie, with your permission, I will see Lady Ruxley immediately, after which I shall wish to introduce you to those high-born kinsmen of mine."

"Not to-day, Adrian, please. I cannot bear you to speak to Lady Ruxley to-day. I have hardly got used to my own happiness yet. Let it rest until we go back to the villa, and then I will not say you nay," pleaded the young girl, earnestly.

Her joy was something so new and sacred that she felt unwilling to impart the knowledge of it yet to any one.

"Very well, darling, let it be as you wish. That will not be very long to wait, and meantime I shall call the high and mighty ones into counsel," he replied, with a sly laugh, which brought the ever-ready color into her cheeks again.

He was so confident of the welcome which she would receive from Lord and Lady Dunforth!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"SHE IS NOT BENEATH ME.

Contrary to her own and Brownie's expectations, and somewhat to the disappointment of the latter, Lady Ruxley decided to return to West Malling the next afternoon. She had taken cold the night previous, and was not as well as usual, and thought she would feel better to be at home.

Lord Dunforth politely urged her to remain, while Lady Dunforth regretted her indisposition, and promised that she should receive every attention, but all to no purpose, and at four o'clock she was assisted to her carriage by Adrian, who had tried in vain all day to secure an interview with his betrothed.

The exacting old woman, for the first time during Brownie's sojourn with her, had been really cross, keeping her gentle companion in constant attendance upon her, so the young lovers had to content themselves with a fond pressure of the hand, a loving glance of the eye, and a low-breathed farewell.

"I shall come soon, my darling," Adrian had managed to whisper as he handed her into the carriage, and then stood wistfully watching it until it was out of sight.

Lady Ruxley reached home about five, where she found awaiting her a summons to Vallingham Hall.

Lady Randal was planning a musical soiree to come off the

following week, and requested her aunt to lend her Miss Dundas' services for the occasion. She also stated that it would take three or four days' practice to prepare for the occasion, meanwhile they were invited to make the Hall their home, she promising that her ladyship should have every comfort and attention, and be assigned rooms in as quiet a portion of the house as possible.

"It will do the child good; she has perked up wonderfully in the last two days by just going over to Dunforth Castle," mused the old lady, who continued to marvel at the wondrous change in her usually sad companion.

Truly the mournful eyes had grown strangely brilliant, and the pale cheeks were now tinged with the loveliest pink that ever gleamed in the heart of a sea-shell.

"Poor child!" she continued, as her mind went back over the last two months, "she has been shut up so tight with a withered old woman, that it's no wonder she has drooped; she will die if I don't give her a chance to see some life and gayety. Yes, we will go."

Wholly unmindful of the aches and pains which had hurried her home from Dunforth Castle, she rang the bell a furious peal for her maid.

"Pack up a week's supply of clothing and have it ready by ten to-morrow. We go to Vallingham Hall for a seven days' visit."

With which command, she left the astonished Minnett and hobbled away to find Brownie and impart the news to her.

Poor Minnett, who had but just unpacked, and who knew that my lady hated Vallingham Hall when it was full of com-

pany, grumbled, and wondered what new freak would possess her strange mistress next.

Brownie, as soon as she had removed her wrappings, repaired to the conservatory, and was greatly surprised when she heard Lady Ruxley's cane come clicking over the tiled floor, supposing her to be snug in bed, and enjoying the delights of a rousing rum-sweat—her favorite remedy for colds and rheumatics.

"I thought I should find you here," her ladyship said, as Brownie arose quickly and came forward to lead her to a chair. "You like birds and flowers, don't you?" she added, keenly regarding the lovely smiling face and sparkling eyes.

"Yes, my lady, I am exceedingly fond of them. But are you not imprudent to come here where it is so damp, with your cold?" she asked, as she seated her and placed a hassock at her feet. She was ever tenderly mindful of her comfort.

"No, no, child; I'm all right now I am home again. I never feel well when I'm visiting—that is," she hastened to add, "in strange places. It did you good, though; you have more color, and look brighter."

"Yes, I am much better than when I first came to West Malling," Brownie admitted, with a conscious blush.

"Yes, the trip to the Castle did you much good undoubtedly," persisted her ladyship, nodding and chuckling knowingly.

What could she mean? Brownie wondered.

Had she fathomed her secret with those keen eyes and sharp perceptive faculties of hers?

It seemed like it, surely; but she would not commit herself

if she could help it. Adrian must break the knowledge of their engagement to her himself; so she only murmured:

"It was a change, you know."

"Yes, yes; that's it. Young folks need change. I was a fool not to think of it before. I might have known that a young, bright thing like you would droop and pine, hived up with a crooning old owl like me for company."

"Pray, dear Lady Ruxley, do not talk so!" Brownie interrupted, eagerly, and much distressed at her words. "Indeed, I have been very happy with you—much more so than I was during the five months previous."

"I know—I know all about it. You're plucky, and you will not own it to me. But you've been lonely and sad. I've got eyes, and I can see for myself. You went away from here pale, sad, and quiet; you come back rosy, happy, almost gay, and the life, music, and company up yonder was what you needed, and you shall have some more of it. I like to see folks bright and chipper about me."

Brownie felt more and more guilty.

She knew what Lady Ruxley said about her looks and appearance was true; and though she knew that she would soon know the reason for the change in her, yet she felt a trifle guilty to allow her to attribute it to anything else, and blame herself for her former sadness.

But her next words filled her with still deeper dismay.

"They've got a house full of company as usual up at the Hall, and we go there, too, to-morrow, to stop a few days."

"Indeed, Lady Ruxley, I hope you are not going on my ac-

count. I do not desire or need company, and I should really prefer to remain quietly here," she said, in distress.

"Oh! I've got eyes—good ones, too, if they are old; besides, Lady Randal desires it. She is getting up a soiree, and desires your services as musician. She sent a note to-day, asking me."

"But—but you are not well. Really, I think it would be best for neither of us to go."

"Oh, I'm all right, and I've given Minnett orders to have everything in readiness by to-morrow at ten. You will please be ready by that time, too," returned her ladyship, somewhat impatiently, who thought the young girl hesitated about going only on her account.

That settled it, of course.

Brownie could not refuse point-blank to go, but her heart grew faint within her at the thought of meeting the Coolidges, and particularly under an assumed name.

Of course she could not avoid meeting them, and doubtless they would reveal all the past to both Lady Randal and Lady Ruxley.

They would tell their story about the jewels, and of that scene with Wilbur, and the way she had left their employ.

She grew pale, and silent, and depressed again, and sat a long time after my lady had left her in troubled thought, until suddenly she remembered that Adrian loved her—that she was his promised wife.

She grew strong at once again with the thought.

She drew herself proudly up.

What need had she to fear Isabel Coolidge, or, indeed, any one, now that she had him to lean upon and protect her?

The only circumstance she regretted was the false name. She was sorry she had not corrected Lady Ruxley's mistake in the first place, and kept her own.

Aside from that, she was conscious of her own purity and innocence, and felt that she could give back scorn for scorn; while, if worse came to worst, she could tell her own story about the jewels, and call upon Adrian to corroborate the truth of her statement.

Yes, she resolved to go to Vallingham Hall, and with a feeling of independence such as she had not known since leaving the United States. Perhaps, too, she should be able to get back her jewels.

In a few days every one would know of her engagement, and then they would be obliged to receive her as she ought to be received, or else give the cold shoulder to Adrian, which she did not have the least fear they would do.

She knew she was capable of outshining Isabel anywhere; she was more thoroughly accomplished, and more at ease in company. She resolved to do her very best for Lady Randal until Adrian should come to claim her, which, she doubted not, would be in a very few days; then there would be no more toil or care for her—nothing but the bliss of loving and being beloved.

With these brighter thoughts in her mind, she sought her own room to prepare for her absence and the approaching gayeties, which, after all, she began to anticipate with something of pleasure and interest.

Meanwhile a very different scene was being enacted at Dunforth Castle.

As soon as Lady Ruxley's carriage was driven from sight, Adrian Dredmond turned to his grandfather, saying, gravely:

"Can I have a private interview with you, sir?"

"Yes, yes, my boy, of course; come into my sanctum at once."

He led the way to the luxuriously-appointed library, where a cheerful fire in the grate toned the chill air to just the right temperature, and gave the lofty, beautiful room an appearance of home-like comfort.

"Well, now what is it, Ad?" the old man asked, familiarly, as he threw himself into his easy-chair, and bent a look of pride upon the young lover's handsome, animated face.

Adrian colored, but coming to the point at once, said:

"Sir, I desire your permission to marry."

"Bless my soul, my boy! what's this?" and he sat up and stared at his grandson for a moment, as if he had never thought of such a thing before in connection with him.

"Well, well," he added the next, "you took me rather by surprise, that's a fact; but, after all, you couldn't please me better. Aha! that accounts for your hurry to get back to London, doesn't it?"

"Yes—no," replied Adrian, somewhat confused, and yet half-laughing at his grandfather's comical surprise and ready acquiescence to his request.

"Yes—no," repeated his lordship, with a merry twinkle in his eye; "that is rather a doubtful reply. But, seriously, Adrian, my boy, nothing would give me greater satisfaction than

to see you settled in life; and I have no doubt but that the lady of your choice is in every way desirable."

"She is, sir, a perfect lady, highly educated and accomplished; and there never was, in my opinion, a more beautiful Countess of Dunforth than she will make," returned the ardent lover, who felt that everything was progressing finely.

"Yes, yes; that is always so with lovers. I remember——"

What he remembered he did not say, but his face grew wan and sad as he suddenly checked himself.

Then he resumed, more gravely:

"The lady is of good birth, of course?"

"Yes, sir, excellent," Adrian returned, recalling what his friend Gordon had said about Miss Mehetabel's "family tree." Then he added: "But misfortune of a very serious nature has deprived her during the last six or eight months of all her property, and death of her last friend."

"That is bad, truly, my boy; but then you will have enough, and to spare, and I would be the last one to put anything in the way of your happiness for the lack of filthy lucre. You love the lady, of course?" and he searched the noble face that *he* loved so well.

"As my own life!" Adrian said, earnestly.

"Ah! you have been a sly dog to get so far as this and we never suspect it. Who is the fair inamorata?"

"You would not deem it anything out of the way, I presume, sir, if a lady of good birth should be reduced to the necessity of becoming a governess or a companion?" Adrian asked, ignoring the question, and determined to lay all the facts before his grandfather before telling his darling's name.

"Zounds, Adrian! has it been so bad as that in the case of your lady-love?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the quicker you marry her, and relieve her dire necessity, the better," his lordship said, little thinking how he was committing himself.

"Thank you. Yes, sir, it came to that, as I told you, some six or eight months ago."

"But—what is this? Why, you were in America at that time," and he began to fidget uneasily.

"Yes, sir; I met the lady in America."

"Ah, ha!"

This time Lord Dunforth scowled disapprobation. He had the English prejudice against English nobility intermarrying with American plebeianism, so called.

Adrian noticed his look, and his heart sank.

"My lord," he said, "you have seen the lady, and acknowledged her loveliness. I heard you tell Sir Charles that she was very beautiful, and too much of a lady for the position which she occupies. I assure you, and I speak advisedly, that she is of good birth, and fitted in every way to be my wife. She is companion to Lady Ruxley. Have I still your permission to marry her?"

His lordship stared at his grandson in dismay.

He had, indeed, seen Brownie, and marveled at her loveliness and gentle breeding. He was charmed with her musical accomplishments, and had conversed for ten minutes or more with her, feeling all the time strangely fascinated in her presence. He had felt a sort of sad pity for the beautiful girl in

such a position as companion to a crusty, irritable old woman like Lady Ruxley, and he would gladly have befriended her, helping her to a higher place in life; but to have his grandson, the pride of his heart, the one on whom all his future hopes depended, marry her, was not the way he would have taken to do it.

"Miss Dundas, Adrian!" he exclaimed, aghast, his fine face flushing a deep crimson.

"Miss Douglas, my lord," corrected Adrian, somewhat proudly.

His lordship did not notice the correction. His head was bent in deep thought, his brow was knotted, his lips compressed. At length, looking up, he said, with emotion:

"My boy, your happiness is of the greatest importance to me, and has always been my first consideration. I know what it is to love deeply, and the anguish which follows the loss of a loved one,"—his voice quivered painfully. "But," he added, "it is better to give up an unworthy love than to marry beneath you, and then repent of it when it is too late."

"Sir, the lady is *not* unworthy, and I shall never repent making her my wife," Adrian said, indignantly, then continued, speaking rapidly: "I told you that she descended from a highly respectable family. They were English, too, and removed to America many years ago. They were very wealthy at that time, but a series of misfortunes deprived them of this. I learned this from my friend Gordon, whom, you remember, I met two years ago in Germany. He vouched for her respectability, and told me he had seen the 'family tree,' and that they traced back their ancestry to the Scottish nobility."

"But it must be very remote. Besides, she was born and reared in America, and has not a friend living, as you say, to prove her respectability, and all this would be very disagreeable to establish."

"The fact that *I* have chosen her for my wife would be sufficient to establish her respectability without any questioning," replied Adrian, proudly.

"But I want you to have an English wife, Adrian—one who will fill her position proudly and creditably."

"I am as eager for that, my lord, as you can possibly be," said the young man, with a quiet smile, as he thought how perfectly Brownie would reign in those grand old halls.

"How came she to be in England if she was so reduced in circumstances?"

"She came over as governess with a family, in the same steamer with myself."

"How does it happen that they did not retain her—that she left them to be companion to a woman like Lady Ruxley?" demanded his lordship, his face beginning to grow stern and set.

Adrian colored vividly. He knew it did not sound well, but he was truth itself, and replied:

"She was ill-treated, and insulted—in fact, was accused of taking that which did not belong to her."

"Enough, sir! No person with any such record can ever become allied to *my* family!" burst forth Lord Dunforth, rising from his chair in wrath.

"But, sir, let me explain——"

"No, SIR!" he thundered; "not another word! I am astonished and disappointed in you, Adrian, that you could so

demean yourself as to *desire* to marry any one so far beneath you."

"She is not beneath me," began the indignant lover, hotly.

"Not another word, Adrian, if you please, on the subject, unless you wish to incur my stern displeasure. *You*, the future Earl of Dunforth, marry a person accused of theft! NEVER!" and he paced the floor with angry strides.

Suddenly he wheeled upon his grandson, and demanded:

"May I ask have you made proposals to this very *estimable person?*"

"I have, my lord." The manly eyes blazed dangerously at this almost insulting question, while his hands worked nervously at the biting sarcasm of his grandfather's words.

"Fool!"

"*Sir!*"

"You're a fool, I say."

The two men glanced at each other furiously for a moment. Then Adrian, growing very pale, moved a step or two back, and said, in a quiet, though concentrated voice:

"Then I am to understand that you refuse your consent to my marrying?"

"I do, most emphatically *refuse* to allow you to marry any such *doubtful person* as Lady Ruxley's companion appears to be. Shame upon you for stooping so low!"

"Then, my Lord Dunforth, listen to me," Adrian said, flushing angrily, and drawing his proud form to its fullest height. "I love this gentle girl with my whole heart; I have told her so, and I have asked her to be my wife. I am of age, and—*sir, I shall marry her!*"

Lord Dunforth suddenly wheeled about, and came forward with rapid strides.

The two proud men stood looking steadfastly into each other's eyes for a moment, and each read there a determination never to yield.

"Then you are no longer a child of mine!" whispered the irate lord, hoarsely, his whole frame shaking from anger, disappointment, and mortification.

"Grandfather," returned Adrian, sadly, "you know I love you, and would gladly do anything in reason to please you; but the happiness of two lives is at stake, and in this matter I must choose for myself."

There was a note of quiet determination in his voice, albeit it was so sad, which told the other that he meant every word he uttered.

"Then choose for yourself," he cried, almost beside himself with grief and mortified pride, "and choose beggary with your wife, for not one shilling from the Dunforth coffers shall you ever touch."

"But I am not a beggar quite yet, my lord; I have my own income," returned Adrian, proudly, yet smiling in spite of himself, for his income was no mean one.

"Then leave me—begone!"

"Sir——"

"Not another word, unless you will yield to me!" shouted the earl.

"I cannot!"

"Then go! marry your plebeian beggar, and never darken Dunforth's doors again!"

"Is that your ultimatum? Have you no sympathy nor mercy?" asked Adrian, growing very white about the mouth, though his eyes gleamed with a lurid light.

His lordship caught his breath hard at these questions. Who should have sympathy if not he? But he would not yield.

"It is my ultimatum. I have no sympathy with anything like that," he said, yet the face of his own lost love arose before him at that moment like a phantom.

With an inclination of his haughty head, Adrian turned and left the room without another word.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HOW CAME YOU HERE."

Lady Ruxley had said truly that Vallingham Hall was full of company, and as Brownie, who sat reading to her ladyship the next morning after their arrival, caught the sound of fresh young voices and silvery laughter, as they floated up through those lofty halls, she felt her own heart grow warm and light, and she found herself longing to mingle with the gay company. Lady Ruxley had tried to prevail upon her to go down the evening previous and enjoy the music and dancing, but the thought of meeting the Coolidges was so repugnant to her that she preferred remaining quietly in her own room, although it was quite a trial, knowing that Viola and Alma were in the same house, and yet not be able to see them.

Just before noon Lady Randal came bustling in in great haste, bearing a great box in her hands.

"Auntie," she began, affably, "I want to borrow Miss Dundas for a little while."

"What for?" demanded the old lady, sharply, and eying the box suspiciously.

She had no idea of having the young girl imposed upon, or made to perform any disagreeable tasks for her exacting niece.

"I can't find an operetta which I had set my heart upon

having performed at the soiree. I thought I could put my hand upon it at once, but I have mislaid it, and thought it might be among these papers. Charles wants me immediately to arrange the programme, so that I have not time to look for it myself, and I thought perhaps Miss Dundas might be willing to hunt for me. Will you?" she demanded, turning to Brownie.

"Certainly, if Lady Ruxley has no objections," she answered, quietly.

"Well, well, child, you'd never refuse, no matter what anybody asked of you. Put down the box, Helen, and she shall look as soon as she has finished the article she is reading," Lady Ruxley replied.

Lady Randal obeyed.

"While you see about it, you may as well arrange the papers orderly—they have been turned over so many times that they are all in a muss," she said, and then left the room.

Half an hour after, her reading finished, she took the box to a large table standing in the bay-window, and began her work.

It was no easy task to put that promiscuous assortment in order.

There were bills of all kinds, letters, and notes, and memoranda, all mixed with loose papers and envelopes.

She at length succeeded in finding the operetta, and then proceeded to arrange and tie up the letters, bills, and other documents, so that they need not get mixed again.

She had nearly finished her task, and the bundles were all neatly arranged in the box, when taking up a small package,

the wrapper suddenly gave way, and several little notes and papers fell scattering into her lap.

They were directed to different persons, and all in different handwriting, and Brownie could not help wondering how they happened to be in Lady Randal's possession.

She began to gather them up, pondering upon the singular circumstance, yet too honorable to take advantage of her opportunity and gratify her curiosity, when her eye fell upon a note, the corner of which had been doubled back, revealing the writing within.

The writing, though irregular, as if a trembling hand had traced it, had a strangely familiar look as she glanced at it.

It had been written with a pencil, and was not very distinct. Bending closer, Brownie discovered the words "repentant Meta."

A thrill of intense pain ran through every nerve, and without stopping to consider that she had no moral right to do so, she unfolded the paper—it was yellow and old, and only folded once—and began to read.

Scarce had her eye swept over the few words written within, when every vestige of color faded from her cheeks and lips, while her eyes burned with a fierce, vengeful light.

She had heard of that little note before.

How well she remembered the pain in that dear old face, the quivering of those sweet pale lips, and the note of mortal anguish in the loved voice which had told her of this little message which had never accomplished its mission.

In her mind she went back nearly fifty years, and saw a beautiful young girl lying pale and sick in a lofty room, a deep scar

upon her fair temple, but a deeper pain looking forth from the sad eyes, as she watched eagerly for the sound of a footstep which never came.

Yes, it was the very note—that anguished, repentant cry, which Miss Mehetabel had sent from the depths of her soul to the man she had loved!

"Yes, come at once, if you can forgive your repentant

"META."

How well she remembered the words, and now she had found them, as her aunt had told her, in the possession of Helen Capel, now Lady Randal.

They had been kept back from the honest, faithful lover, who was only waiting for this permission to fly to the side of his betrothed and comfort her, by the hand of this treacherous woman, who had thus ruthlessly wrecked a human life, yea, two lives!

How strange, Brownie thought, that the note should thus have fallen into her hands.

"Surely there is Providence in it," she murmured, as with one swift glance to see that Lady Ruxley was not observing her, she hid it in her bosom, and then hurriedly completed her task.

The operetta was sent to Lady Randal, and the box of papers returned to their accustomed place, but all day long Brownie felt as if a mountain was crushing her heart, with that little paper lying in her bosom.

She felt she could not breathe in the same house and under the same roof which sheltered the woman who had deliberately planned to entrap a young and guileless girl into disgracing

both herself and her lover, that she might separate them forever, hoping to win him for herself.

She wondered if Lady Ruxley knew of her share in the event, or if Lord Dunforth had ever found it out.

Probably not, since they were still good friends, and had he known of it, he could not have forgiven so bitter a wrong.

The more she thought of these things the more her heart rebelled against them, until she grew so restless and nervous that she nearly cried out with pain whenever any one spoke to her.

About four o'clock, finding that Lady Ruxley was sleeping, she stole out, thinking to get away into the sunshine and calm herself, and perhaps Adrian would come ere long, and she could share her burden with him; at all events, he would comfort her.

She opened the door and passed noiselessly out into the hall.

She had nearly traversed the long corridor leading to the grand staircase, when she almost ran against some one who suddenly came out of a room she was passing.

"I beg your pardon," Brownie murmured, and then looked up to see who it was.

It was none other than Isabel Coolidge!

Instantly the two girls braced themselves for the encounter, and looked the surprise which neither of them for the moment could speak.

"*You* here?" Isabel exclaimed at length, growing white, while her eyes emitted a lurid light.

"Yes, Miss Coolidge," gently replied Brownie, yet with lifted eyebrows and a calm, scornful look into her enemy's face.

"How came you here?"

"Pardon me, but I have neither the time nor the inclination to relate the train of circumstances which brought me here," she said, coldly.

"Insolence! then it *was* you whom I heard singing down at Lady Ruxley's villa the other day!"

"Doubtless, since I sing to her ladyship every day."

"What an appreciative listener you must have in that old crooked back," sneered Isabel.

Brownie's eyes blazed dangerously.

"I presume Sir Charles Randal would be much edified with Miss Coolidge's remark regarding his aged aunt," she said.

Isabel looked frightened for a minute, then replied, with a short laugh:

"He might be, if he should hear it, that's a fact. Then you're her companion. I remember now hearing that she took a sudden shine to a young woman who met with an accident, and would have her stay with her. You're mighty lucky about getting into fine places, it seems to me."

A curl of those beautiful red lips was all the satisfaction she received for this insulting speech, and then Brownie made as if she would have passed on.

"Wait," commanded Isabel, peremptorily, and laying her hand upon the young girl's shoulder.

She was inwardly boiling with rage that she could not move or browbeat the haughty governess.

"Wait," she repeated, "I have not done with you yet."

"Please remove your hand from my shoulder, Miss Coolidge," Brownie commanded, in tones that she dare not disobey.

"Mr. Dredmond called upon you at our house the day you left; he said he had something belonging to you which he came to return," she went on, as her hand fell by her side, and drooping her eyes before the other's indignant gaze.

She was very curious about the object of that visit.

"I know it," replied Brownie, much amused, as she saw that Isabel was almost afraid of her in her haughty pride.

"*You know it?* How?"

"Yes, and I have my property back again," and she deftly shifted her cuff, bringing the glittering button upon the upper side of her sleeve.

Miss Coolidge started slightly on beholding the elegant trifle.

"Ah, that was it, then? It is very elegant, isn't it? I presume it belongs with the collection we have in our possession," she said, spitefully.

"It does, Miss Coolidge, and I will thank you to return my property."

"When you *prove* it *is* yours I will."

"These buttons are marked with my name on the back."

"That may be; you have had plenty of time, doubtless, to get them marked," sneered Isabel.

"I shall *compel* you to return that casket to me," retorted Brownie, with flashing eyes.

"Ha, ha! perhaps you will, and then again perhaps you won't. But we have dicussed that subject sufficiently in the past. When did you see Mr. Dredmond?" Isabel asked, insolently, and noting how exquisitely lovely Brownie had grown since she saw her last.

"Really, Miss Coolidge, if I remain here longer I shall lose my walk, and that I cannot afford to do."

With which tantalizing remark, Brownie, her figure proudly erect, moved down the corridor, leaving her interlocutor beautifully in the dark as to how or when she had seen Mr. Dredmond.

"I suppose you thought by coming down here you'd have a better chance to practice your wiles upon that young gentleman; but, mark my words, you won't succeed, for I shall feel it my duty to inform Lady Randal of the very suspicious character which she is harboring," hissed the irate girl after her.

She might just as well have talked to the winds, for Miss Douglas never gave a sign that she heard, but passing swiftly down the stairs, she was suddenly greeted with joyful exclamations, and then found herself encircled by two pairs of arms, and fresh, dewy lips kissed her with delight.

Her captors were Viola and Alma, who at once besieged her with questions, until she laughingly covered the mouth of each with her little hands.

"Rest your tongues and my ears, you chatter-boxes, and come with me, and you shall have the whole history of my proceedings," she said, gayly.

Then, suddenly remembering, she grew very grave and added:

"But perhaps your mamma would object."

"Let her object, then," retorted Viola, undutifully. "I know you are as good as an angel, and it would be better for all of us if we had been more in your company," and linking

their arms within hers, they bore her almost forcibly out of the hall and off into the park.

An hour passed in pleasant chat, during which Brownie told them of her accident, and how strangely she came to be in Lady Ruxley's employ; then she said she must return, and left the delighted girls, promising to see them often if Mrs. Coolidge offered no objections.

As she entered the vestibule she heard Isabel's gay laugh in the drawing-room, and heaved a sigh of relief that she should not meet her again, and, speeding up the stairs, she hastened toward Lady Ruxley's apartments.

As she passed Isabel's room again, she saw that the door was open.

Her maid had gone out a few moments before, had carelessly left it standing open, and was now in the servants' hall flirting with the butler's assistant.

Involuntarily Brownie paused and glanced within, and her heart stood still as her eye almost instantly caught sight of her own little ebony casket standing upon the elegant dressing-case, its tiny key in the lock, with the delicate chain attached.

Swift as light the impulse came upon her to enter and seize it, and bear it away to her own room.

She glided quickly and noiselessly forward.

There was no one in the corridor, there was no one in the room.

She crossed the threshold, and with a few fleet steps cleared the space between herself and her treasures.

She lifted the lid.

All were there in their glittering beauty.

She closed the box again, turned the key in the lock, removed it, and fastened the chain about her neck, concealing it beneath the folds of her dress.

The next moment she had the precious casket in her hands, and turned, to find herself face to face with Mrs. Coolidge.

CHAPTER XXX.

ENTRAPPED.

"Thief!" hissed the woman, under her breath. "How dare you? Where did you come from?"

She had not seen Isabel since her encounter with Brownie, therefore did not know until that moment of her proximity.

She had come out of her own room just as Miss Douglas entered Isabel's, and seeing the door open, glanced in as Brownie had done.

She recognized Miss Douglas in an instant, and comprehended at once her object there.

She glided in noiselessly, hoping to come upon her unawares, and wrest the casket from her without much trouble, but the girl turned just in season to confront her.

Brownie herself grew pale at this unexpected encounter, but clutching her recovered property firmly in her hands, she held herself proudly at bay.

"You are the thief, madam—you and your daughter," she said, haughtily.

"Liar! Put that box down!"

"I shall not, madam!"

"Then I will ring and have you arrested. I know not how you happen to be here—I devoutly hoped you would never

cross our path again; but fate seems to decree that you turn up as a marplot wherever we go. Will you put that box down, or shall I ring?" and the angry woman grasped the bell-pull vigorously.

Brownie never relaxed a muscle, except that the proud lips curled into a scornful smile.

"You can ring the bell if you choose, Mrs. Coolidge."

"Have you no fear of the consequences?" her enemy asked, eying her wonderingly, and her lips twitching with wrath.

"None!"

"But you will have to face this whole household."

"Gather the whole household here if you will, and have the facts regarding this property brought to light; also the way in which you became possessed of it. Methinks Sir Charles Randal would not be pleased to know that his betrothed wife entered the room of another, made a Paul Pry of herself, and purloined such things as these."

Mrs. Coolidge winced at her words, and she could have trampled her under foot for her scorn and fearlessness.

"You are insolent, Miss Douglas," she breathed, in suppressed, wrathful tones.

"Insolent or not, I only speak plain truth; and I shall not yield up this casket unless personal violence is used to wrest it from me," Brownie answered, with calm dignity.

"You are cool, truly," sneered the woman, exasperated by her manner more than by her words, and as desirous of creating no disturbance as Brownie herself could be.

"Yes, I am cool. This box is *mine*, I tell you, and this much I will say, if you persist in disputing my right to it and

its contents, I have only to appeal to a certain nobleman of the realm to substantiate my claim and protect me from your abuse," Brownie said, suddenly resolving to appeal to Lord Dunforth if Mrs. Coolidge persisted in her abuse.

"A nobleman of the realm! *You!*"

Intense scorn was breathed in these few words.

"Yes, madam, *I!* I have but to tell my story of these jewels to prove that they belong to me, and reveal your wickedness to those whom you do not care to have know it."

"Pray, why did you not make this appeal in the first place?" queried Mrs. Coolidge, skeptically.

"Because I did not know then if he were living. I have since discovered that he is. Now, as I have no desire to prolong this interview further, I will wish you good-day."

Brownie took a step toward the door, but her enemy, rendered desperate by her undaunted bearing, and the fearful consequences which would result, if Isabel should thus suddenly be deprived of wearing the jewels, darted before her, shut the door, locking it, and put the key in her pocket.

"There! we will see who will win in this little game, Miss Douglas," she said, between her teeth, while there was a dangerous gleam in her eye. "You do not leave this room," she added, "until you give up that casket. How do you suppose Isabel will account for the disappearance of all her elegant jewels, which have been so much admired?"

"Madam, truth is a virtue which is safe *always* to cultivate," Brownie answered, with quiet sarcasm.

Mrs. Coolidge sighed in despair.

What should she do with this brave, proud girl?

She utterly baffled her; while she was so cool, so haughty, so beautiful, standing so fearless there, with her jewels closely clasped in her arms, that she became enraged beyond endurance.

"Will you give me that, once for all, I ask you?" she whispered, hoarsely, with livid face, and a deadly light in her light blue eyes.

"*I will not!*" and the beautiful brown eyes met hers fearlessly, defiantly.

Mrs. Coolidge took a few steps forward as if impelled by some hidden force, hesitated, bent her head a moment in thought, while an evil smile flitted over her hard features.

Then assuming a more conciliatory tone, she said:

"Really, Miss Douglas, you are so persistent, and so positive, that you almost persuade me into the belief that the jewels are yours after all."

Brownie made no reply to this concession, but stood quietly regarding her enemy.

"Come into my room and let us talk the matter over quietly," the wily woman added, flashing a cunning look at the young girl from her half-closed eyes. "I think we can come to a better understanding, and I have a proposition to make to you."

Brownie felt somewhat suspicious of this smooth talk, and feared that the sudden change in Mrs. Coolidge's manner was only assumed for some hidden purpose; yet she thought it might be better to temporize with her, and it would, perhaps, save publicity.

She could not leave the room, as things were, without making a disturbance, for the door was locked, the key in the woman's

pocket, and she knew of no other means of egress, although there were several arches in the spacious apartment, hung with draperies, which she thought must conceal entrances to some other portion of the house.

"I do not know what better understanding you may wish for," she replied, coldly. "Your daughter took this box from my room, and I have told you repeatedly that it and its contents belong to me, and you know as well as I, Mrs. Coolidge, that any judge would decide in my favor should the case be brought into court. But we can talk it over here as well as anywhere."

"Then why did you come sneaking into this room like a thief to get them? Why *didn't* you take the matter into court and let the *judge* decide in your favor?" sneered the exasperated woman, almost losing her self-control again under Brownie's coolness, and her refusal to go with her.

"I did not sneak into the room like a thief, madam. I was passing along the corridor, the door was open, and glancing in, I saw my casket upon the table, I entered, and took it, intending to inform Miss Coolidge of the fact as soon as I had it beyond her reach."

"You say you can prove your claim. Who is this nobleman who knows so much about these jewels?" asked Mrs. Coolidge, with sudden interest.

Brownie thought a moment before answering.

She disliked to implicate his lordship in the matter if she could possibly help it; but she saw that Mrs. Coolidge was desperate about the jewels, and, perhaps, the power of his name might frighten her into letting them go, and the matter would drop there, so she said :

"It is Lord Dunforth!"

"Lord Dunforth!" she exclaimed, with a violent start of surprise.

Then she suddenly remembered, with a thrill that made her feel faint, Isabel's account of her strange interview with his lordship at Lady Peasewell's, and she began to fear that she was getting beyond her depth in this matter; and yet this very revelation made her more determined than ever to keep the jewels, at least until after Isabel's marriage; for their absence would occasion a great hue and cry, and necessitate such awkward explanations that Sir Charles would mistrust something wrong, and then all their plans would be ruined, for he had only that day named the wedding-day. Yet, if she resorted to force to keep them, Brownie, on the other hand, would instantly take active measures to recover them, and if she could, as she said, prove through Lord Dunforth that they were hers, they would immediately be brought into open disgrace. Whichever way she turned, it looked dark.

There was only one way of escape from this threatening danger, and that was very hazardous; but she had resolved from the first, if worse came to worst, that she would try it, and that was why she appeared so anxious to get her into her rooms.

She stood measuring her strength against Brownie's, while these thoughts passed through her mind, and that same cunning gleam lurked in her eyes as before.

"Lord Dunforth!" she repeated. "Do you know him?"

"No, madam; at least not well enough to claim his acquaintance and protection, except in case of stern necessity;

but he knows all about these jewels, and when I told my story he would know that I spoke the truth."

"*How* would he know it? When did he ever see those jewels before he saw Isabel wear them?" the woman asked inquisitively, and burning with a desire to know more about them herself.

"Madam," Brownie answered, haughtily, "I decline answering any more questions. I insist that you let me go quietly; you can then make whatever explanation regarding the absence of these gems you may see fit. But if you persist in giving me further trouble, I shall immediately make the whole matter public, and doubtless *you* know what the consequences will be."

Mrs. Coolidge's eyes flashed, and the young girl catching their gleam at that instant involuntarily shivered, they looked so evil.

"My dear Miss Douglas," she began, politely, after a moment, "can we not temporize in this matter? You know if Isabel ceases suddenly to wear those jewels it is going to make matters very awkward for her. Could you not be persuaded for a handsome consideration to *loan* them to her until after her marriage, which will be in a little more than a month?"

Brownie's lips curled with scorn at this proposition. The woman who could make it under the existing circumstances seemed so little and small of soul to her.

"No, madam; I think I have *loaned* them long enough already," was her quiet but scathing reply.

The angry woman's lips twitched nervously, and her hands were clenched with passion that this poor, friendless girl should *dare* to thwart her so—that she should dare to stand so proudly,

defiantly before her, and fling out so coolly her scathing sarcasms. She grew white as the delicate lace at her throat, and her eyes burned with a lurid light which boded mischief.

"Hark" she said, suddenly. "Somebody is coming. It may be Isabel, and we shall have a scene. Come into my room and I will let you out through there."

She walked swiftly across the room, seemingly much disturbed, although Brownie had caught no sound of any one approaching.

She pushed aside some hangings and revealed a narrow door.

Brownie wondered that such a narrow, peculiar door should connect two elegant rooms, but she reasoned that this must be part of the original castle, and that all these elegant hangings had been put up to conceal the awkward doors.

Before opening it, Mrs. Coolidge shoved a heavy bolt (another circumstance which struck Brownie as singular), and opening the door, revealed a small, square room or passage, dimly lighted by a dormer window set high in the stone wall.

The place was perfectly bare, and there was a damp, uncanny feeling in the atmosphere, as if it had not been opened before in a long while.

Brownie involuntarily drew back as she reached the door, and again glanced suspiciously at her companion.

Mrs. Coolidge, who was watching her prey with the intentness of a cat watching a mouse, noticed her hesitation, and, with a light laugh, said:

"It isn't a very nice way to take you, Miss Douglas, but it saves going through the corridor, and I would not have Isabel meet you now, with that casket in your hands, for the world.

My room is at the end of this passage, and we use it when we want to run back and forth. I do not think it can have been used much of late years, for it is so damp and full of cobwebs; but I discovered it while gratifying my Yankee curiosity to find out what was underneath all these hangings, and we have found it very convenient, I assure you. Come on; I'll go forward and open the door at the other end of the passage, and then you will see better."

She half crossed the dimly-lighted space, and Brownie followed considerably reassured by her fluent explanation, although even then she thought it strange that the door should have been *bolted* if the passage was "so convenient."

Suddenly Mrs. Coolidge stopped with a startled look.

"Did you not hear some one at the door?" she whispered.

"No; I heard nothing," Brownie replied, yet bending her head to listen.

"There is surely some one there," persisted Mrs. Coolidge. "I forgot to unlock Isabel's door, and the key is in my pocket. Wait just a moment while I go and unfasten it."

She glided swiftly by the young girl, holding her breath and watching her narrowly with her basilisk eyes, passed through the narrow door, drew it hastily after her, and shoved the bolt, leaving the astonished and dismayed girl a close prisoner in that dismal cell.

All too late Brownie saw how she had been fooled and entrapped, and berated herself soundly for having trusted the faithless woman for an instant.

After the first surprise was over, she looked about her to measure the dimensions of her prison.

It could not have been more than eight feet by six, and was lighted only by that one small window set so high in the wall that it was impossible to look out. There was no sign of any other door or mode of egress that she could discover, only the bare damp walls of solid stone.

There was not an article of furniture in the place, and Brownie groped her way to the wall, leaning against it for support, for she was excited and trembling at finding herself so cleverly entrapped and shut up from the light of day.

"I suppose she thinks to frighten me into submission by shutting me up like a naughty child," she said, with curling lips and flashing eyes. "But she will find she has 'reckoned without her host,' for only a stronger than I shall ever get these precious jewels away from me again. Oh, auntie," she added, a moment after, "you little knew what a troublesome legacy you were giving me; were they not sacred to me on your account they are not worth all this trouble and contention. But *they* shall not have them now."

She walked to the door and rapped upon it.

"Mrs. Coolidge," she said, in cold, stern tones, "if you think to subdue me thus, and gain your end, you are very much mistaken in my character, and I warn you that you are only heaping up wrath for yourself."

There was no answer, and Brownie finally concluded that the only thing she could do for the present was to exercise abundant patience and wait.

She had not a thought of fear, however, that the wicked woman would dare to keep her there long; her whole soul—all the Douglas blood in her veins rose up in rebellion against

this arbitrary act, and she resolved that the future should hold for her jailer a reckoning full of retribution.

When Mrs. Coolidge had accomplished her piece of diabolical treachery, and the door was bolted upon her prisoner, she sank down upon a chair nearly fainting.

It was a bold thing to do, and fraught with danger, but the deed was done, and nothing remained now but for her to carry out her designs with a high hand.

Her plan was to keep Brownie shut up until overcome with fatigue she should fall asleep, when she would enter the cell and steal the jewels from her again.

If she could not catch her asleep, she thought that she and Isabel together might be able to accomplish their designs by force; for have the jewels and keep them until after the wedding they *must* at all hazards, and if the girl would not promise to keep still about the matter until then, they could keep her shut up until Isabel was Lady Randal, for she did not believe any one would mistrust that she was concealed in that place.

However, she had not much doubt but that she would yield to her terms, and she smiled derisively when Brownie came to the door and spoke so decidedly.

She had lied to her about the passage, for it did not connect with anything that she could discover, and she could not conceive what such a dismal place had ever been built for—her Yankee curiosity on that score was still quite lively, and not likely to be gratified either. She had never thought of putting the place to any such purpose, until suddenly inspired to do so by Brownie's cool defiance, and the thought that only desperate measures would serve to regain the jewels.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I WILL DARE ANYTHING."

Not long after Mrs. Coolidge heard Isabel's voice in the hall.

Hastily rising, she went to the door, unlocked it, though her hands trembled so that it was with difficulty that she inserted the key in the lock.

With her fingers upon her lips, she beckoned her daughter to come in.

"Good gracious, mamma! what is the matter? You are as white as a ghost!" she exclaimed, as she entered.

"Hush! Come in quick, and lock the door again; then I will tell you."

Isabel obeyed, and then Mrs. Coolidge related all that had transpired during the last half hour.

"Confound the girl! I had a wrangle with her myself just a little while before," Isabel exclaimed, angrily.

"Don't, dear, use such language; you will forget yourself to your sorrow some day. What if Sir Charles or Lady Randal should hear you!"

"I can't help it, mamma; it does try my patience so to have her turn up just now, when everything is going so lovely."

"How do you suppose she happened to be here?" asked Mrs. Coolidge, to whom the matter was still a mystery.

"Oh, she is that Miss Dundas who is companion to Lady Ruxley. Since I met her, a couple of hours ago, I have been making some judicious inquiries, and it seems that, instead of going to the Washington Hotel after leaving us, as she told Wilbur she intended to do, she got tipped over in front of Lady Randal's town house, broke her arm, and made such an impression upon Lady Ruxley that she insisted upon taking care of her; and finally nothing would do but she must have her for a companion. You know I told you that I saw some one at the villa when we first came here who looked like Miss Douglas, and I got quite a fright over it until Lady Randal told me her name was Mabel Dundas, and that deceived me."

"It is very unfortunate just now, to say the least, when we are so anxious to have everything go smooth," complained her mother, wearily.

"That is so," returned Isabel, with scowling brow. "You say she still has the casket in there with her?"

"Yes."

"Why under the sun didn't you take it away from her by main force?"

"Because she was so haughty and defiant I did not dare touch her," Mrs. Coolidge admitted, with rather a crest-fallen air.

"I know she has a terrible high and mighty way with her, if she is little."

"Yes, indeed, she has. You'd have thought her a queen if you could have seen her look at me, and tell me to call the whole house, and make the matter public, if I chose. Besides, she told me she should appeal to Lord Dunforth if I did not

let her go quietly; and I knew, after what you had told me, that that would never do."

"No, indeed; it is very evident that he knows too much about the jewels, while we know too little. But how are we going to get out of this abominable muss, anyhow?" and Isabel looked miserably anxious.

"Keep her in there until she gives up the box and promises secrecy," returned her mother, with a significant nod at the vailed door.

"Well, suppose she will not yield at all?"

"She must *sleep*, at all events; and if we cannot catch her in a *natural sleep, there are things that will make her unconscious*, and then we can take the jewels away from her," was the whispered reply.

"But she will be missed meanwhile."

"Well, we must wonder with the rest what has become of her. I am confident no one saw her come in here, and so no one will suspect us in the matter. I tell you, Isabel, we have a desperate game to play now, or you will lose Sir Charles. Those jewels *we must have*, for their absence will occasion endless inquiry and remark. If she won't yield, we must keep her shut up until after the wedding. When that is over, and you are sure of your position, I do not care what becomes of them or her," the proud woman whispered, in concentrated tones, and with a desperate and reckless air that almost frightened her daughter.

"Mamma, would you *dare* keep her in there so long?"

"Yes, I will dare *anything*, rather than that all your bright

prospects should be sacrificed. Just so sure as we let her out, she will reveal everything, and we shall be ruined."

"But you know we are all to go to Paris next week, to be gone a fortnight, and attend to my *trousseau*."

"I know it was so arranged, but you and Lady Randal will have to go—I shall be ill and not able to go; then I can easily look after our prisoner, and no one will be the wiser for it."

"But is there no danger that she will be heard if she should scream, or cry, or make a fuss?"

"Not the least in the world. The place seems to be made of solid masonry; it has no other door but this, which is very thick, and with those heavy curtains dropped over it, no one could ever hear her. Besides, I have no fear that she will make any disturbance—she is too proud."

"What if she should die in there, mamma?"

The two plotting women looked at each other with whitening faces for a moment.

Mrs. Coolidge was the first to recover herself, however.

"Pshaw! what a foolish notion, Isabel. She is strong and well, and there is no danger. I will take her plenty of good food every day, and we can make her up a comfortable bed from our own, and she will do well enough."

"But, mamma, the bare possibility of the thing gives me a dreadful feeling. I am as weak as if I had just recovered from a swoon," said Isabel, shuddering.

"Don't be a fool, child; only let us tide the next four or five weeks over, and we shall be all right. However, if you say so, and are willing to run the risk, we will let her out now," returned Mrs. Coolidge, impatiently.

"No, no, there is no other way as I see but to keep her shut up. Sir Charles is so particular and conscientious that he would never forgive the wrong we have done her, and, mamma, I am really very fond of him. I believe it would upset me entirely if anything should happen to separate us now, and I mean to try and be a better woman after I am married," Isabel returned, nervously, and with very crimson cheeks, as if ashamed of the confession.

"I think you might improve some myself," was the not very soothing reply; "and I do hope you'll let other folks' trunks and boxes alone in the future."

"I begin to wish I'd never touched those jewels—they have given me more trouble than pleasure," Isabel said, gloomily.

"I told you it would be so in the first place," retorted her mother, who was also feeling the stings of conscience pretty sharply, and could not restrain her irritability.

"Well, well, it is too late now for recriminations, but I do wish the next six weeks were well over with," muttered the girl, uneasily.

An hour later Lady Ruxley's bell rang a furious peal. It had been nearly three hours since Brownie left her. Such a thing had never happened before, and she did not know what to make of it. She was getting so attached to her gentle and lovable companion that she missed her sadly if she were absent an hour.

"Like as not Helen has set her about some task or other, but I'll not have it—she sha'n't be imposed upon," she muttered to herself as she clumped about the room with her cane,

glancing first from one window and then another to see if Brownie was coming.

Presently Minnett came in.

"Minnett, find Miss Dundas, and ask her to please come to me," she said, shortly.

Minnett retired, was gone another half hour, while the old lady grew furious at the delay, then returned and said Miss Dundas could not be found.

She was forthwith angrily commanded to go and *find* Miss Dundas, and not return until she did.

Minnett meekly withdrew again, and her ladyship sat another hour fuming and raging, first against her maid, then at Lady Randal, whom she believed to be at the bottom of it all, to serve some purpose of her own, and lastly her ire turned upon Brownie herself for allowing herself to be detained so long.

Finally her patience completely wearied out, she marched down into the drawing-room, ready to berate the first person she met.

Here she found everybody in a great state of excitement over the non-appearance of Miss Dundas.

The servants had all been closely questioned, but no one had seen her go out or come in.

They had then been sent forth into different portions of the house and grounds to search for her.

One, two, three hours more passed, and still no light was thrown upon the mystery. Lady Ruxley became nearly distracted, Lady Randal was very much disturbed, while the guests, who had remarked Brownie's beauty and refinement,

began to whisper of an elopement, or something equally romantic.

In the midst of the excitement, Viola and Alma appeared upon the scene, and upon being told that Miss Dundas was missing, the former asked what sort of a looking person she was.

Sir Charles immediately gave a very accurate description of Brownie, whereupon both girls exclaimed:

"Why, that is our Miss Douglas, and we met her just as she was going out."

Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel were confounded at this speech.

They had not thought of such a thing as the girls meeting her, and had fondly hoped they should not be drawn into the matter any more than to wonder, with the other guests, what could have become of her.

Now Viola's remark would involve no end of explanations, which of all things Mrs. Coolidge was desirous of avoiding.

Everybody gathered around the young girls at once, eager to hear more.

"She was with us an hour or more," Viola further explained, "then she said she must return to the Hall, and the last we saw of her she came this way."

"And who is 'our Miss Douglas,' and what connection has she with Lady Ruxley's companion?" asked Sir Charles, coming forward and looking very grave.

"She was our governess until about two months ago, when—when——"

Viola stammered and got very red in the face.

Her heart prompted her to stand up loyally for the teacher

whom she so dearly loved, but she stood somewhat in awe of her mother, who was regarding her with sternest displeasure, and whose eye she had just caught.

Mrs. Coolidge hastened to the rescue.

"What is this you are saying about Miss Douglas, Viola?" she asked, in well-assumed surprise, at the same time giving her daughter a warning glance.

Viola repeated what she had already said, adding some further account of what had transpired in the park.

When she had concluded, her mother turned to Sir Charles with a grave and sorrowful face.

"I really fear, Sir Charles, that your aunt has been grossly imposed upon. This Miss Douglas, of whom Viola speaks, came over with us from America as governess to the girls. I began to suspect at the very first that she was not just the person I could desire, but I put up with her until about two months ago, when her very unbecoming conduct made it necessary that I should dismiss her immediately."

"What did she do," demanded Lady Ruxley, sharply, "that was so very dreadful?"

"Really, I am very sorry to be drawn into this very disagreeable matter thus. I dislike to say anything derogatory to any one, but since you ask, I will say that she took things which did not belong to her, and made herself offensively free with my son, who is now in Germany," replied Mrs. Coolidge, with every appearance of sorrow that she was obliged to make the confession.

"You'll have to be older than you are now to make me believe that," muttered the old lady, indignantly, in an under

tone, as she eyed Isabel and her mother suspiciously, while Viola and Alma looked the daggers they dare not use to defend their beloved Miss Douglas.

Everybody was intensely interested in these new developments, and the matter was talked over until every one was satisfied that the disgraced governess was none other than Miss Dundas, the companion.

The date of her accident and advent into Lady Randal's house was identical with that of her leaving Mrs. Coolidge, their description of her was the same, and Isabel recalled to Sir Charles the evening of their ramble, when they had seen her at the villa, and she had questioned him regarding the companion.

Every one was convinced now of Brownie's unworthiness, and believed that she had taken herself out of the way because she feared an exposure on the part of Mrs. Coolidge, and dare not meet it, or that she had eloped, but who with was the question.

All but Lady Ruxley.

Her confidence was unshaken yet.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said to Lady Randal, as she assisted her to her room.

"But, aunt, it must be so. Mrs. Coolidge's word is indisputable."

"Maybe you think so," retorted her ladyship, irritably.

"The evidence is so clear, too," resumed her niece, unheeding her remark. "I have feared from the first that you were being imposed upon. That's always the way with these girls who have no recommendation—they are all adventuresses. I

only hope you won't find that she has helped herself from your belongings."

"Shut up, Helen! You are always ready to believe the worst of everybody. I tell you I believe that there has been foul play in this matter, and if the girl has gone away, she has been driven away in some underhanded manner. I can read the signs of the times, if I am superannuated, and I shall not rest until I know more of this matter," and the crusty old lady actually shed tears over the absence of the patient, gentle girl, to whom she was becoming deeply attached.

"The very fact of her giving a false name goes against her," persisted Lady Randal.

"That was not just the thing, of course," was the rather subdued reply. Then she added, as if a new thought struck her: "I believe that I was to blame for that, after all. I had a bad cold at that time, and was as deaf as a post. I am convinced now that she gave me her name correctly, and I misunderstood her, and she, having had trouble with those folks, let it go so."

"She had no business to do that," returned Lady Randal, with an expression of righteous indignation.

"If she never does anything worse than give an assumed name, she'll be better than *some folks* whom I know. I reckon *you've* some sins on *your* conscience, Helen, blacker than any that poor girl ever thought of," said Lady Ruxley, spitefully.

She felt the woman on whose arm she was leaning start violently, and could she have looked into her face at that moment she would have been frightened, for it was perfectly livid, and her lips twitched frightfully. But she let the acrimonious old woman alone after that shot.

Notwithstanding the general belief that Miss Douglas, as she was now called, had absconded, Sir Charles gave orders that the search should be kept up a while longer.

Something *might* have happened to her, he reasoned, and he would give her the benefit of the doubt.

About eight o'clock Adrian Dredmond was announced. He had been to Lady Ruxley's villa, but upon being told that she and her companion were at the Hall, he drove immediately thither.

He was not sorry either to have it so, for he resolved to introduce Brownie at once as his betrothed, and claim Lady Ruxley's protection for her until he could make suitable arrangements for their marriage, which he determined should take place as soon as possible.

Lady Randal met him in the hall on her return from Lady Ruxley's apartments.

She greeted him cordially, and then taking his arm, led him into the drawing-room, where he was received with loud acclamation, for he was a favorite wherever he went.

The conversation ran in a new channel for a few moments after his entrance, but the all-absorbing topic was soon resumed, and Brownie's character was most unmercifully picked to pieces again, while with a terrible sinking at his heart, Adrian soon learned something of what had transpired, and it was with great difficulty that he maintained his composure, hoping to learn more.

But he could not bear the aspersions cast upon his betrothed, and after a terribly scathing remark upon Brownie's virtue from

Isabel, followed by a bitter denunciation from Mrs. Coolidge, his indignation burst forth.

He arose, and, with flushed face and blazing eyes, demanded of the latter:

"Of whom do I understand you to be speaking?"

"Of Miss Douglas, Mr. Dredmond—the governess who came to England with us, and who has turned out so sadly," she replied, serenely, and all unconscious of the terrible storm hovering over her head.

"Perhaps you know *who* is accountable for Miss Douglas' misfortunes since she came abroad?" he returned, meaningly, and with a look that made Isabel's heart quake, for she knew he had seen Brownie lately, and it was possible he, too, knew all the story of their abuse.

But Mrs. Coolidge was, as usual, equal to the occasion.

"Really no. She told me she knew no one in this country," she returned, with raised eyebrows, and in surprised tones.

"*I* know something of Miss Douglas, and that she is undeserving a word of the censure which you have heaped upon her this evening; and I demand that you retract every word you have said—*all* of you!" he said, in tones which could not be mistaken.

There was a sudden hush amoug the company, while all eyes were fixed upon the young man towering so proudly in his haughty strength before them.

"Whew!" whispered one or two young men under their breath. "The pretty little governess is making quite a breeze, and has won one brave champion in her defense, at least."

Mrs. Coolidge felt by no means as easy as she appeared; but hers was a desperate case, and it would not do to relax in the least her vigilance. So she glowered disapprobation and surprise upon him, while Isabel tried to curl her trembling lips in scorn.

"Really, Adrian," soothingly said Lady Randal, who began to be afraid of a quarrel, "I am sorry to see you so excited over this unfortunate affair. I know you are very philanthropic, but I am afraid you are allowing yourself to become quixotic regarding this very singular young person."

His fine lips curled, and he turned and bowed slightly, as he replied:

"If it is quixotic to defend a pure and lovely girl in her absence from such abuse as you have heaped upon her here to-night, then I plead guilty to the charge. I met Miss Douglas several months ago in the United States. I know that she is as well-born as most of you in this room, and few possess the cultivation and accomplishments which she is mistress of. At the time of which I speak she was believed to be the heiress of more than a million, and moved in circles equal to our own, but sudden misfortune reduced her to the necessity of becoming a governess."

"Why, Adrian, I am astonished! I did not suppose that *you* knew aught concerning Miss Douglas," replied Lady Randal, beginning to regard the companion rather more leniently.

"Nor I, that he was *so* interested in the poor but misguided girl," added Mrs. Coolidge, with sarcastic commiseration.

She had never forgiven Adrian's preference for the beautiful

governess that night at the opera, and could not now conceal her spite.

He wheeled upon her in an instant.

"I *am* deeply interested in her, madam. *Miss Douglas is my betrothed wife;* and I warn you to be very careful how you speak of her in the future. I could say much more, but"—with a glance from Isabel to Sir Charles—"existing circumstances compel me to be silent."

CHAPTER XXXII.

BROWNIE'S STRANGE VISITOR.

Had an earthquake shaken the house at that moment greater consternation could not have prevailed than at this announcement.

Sir Charles regarded his friend in blank astonishment, while the company were, most of them, mute from surprise.

Mrs. Coolidge cowed instantly beneath the indignant young lover's stern gaze, and then exchanged guilty glances of dismay with Isabel as they wondered how they would ever answer to him in the future for the doings of that day.

"Adrian, surely you are crazy!" almost shrieked Lady Randal, at last. "*You* make such a mesalliance as that!"

"Call it whatever you choose, madam, but please remember when you speak of Miss Douglas in the future, that you are speaking of the *future Lady of Dunforth,*" he said coldly, but proudly.

Surely a nobler specimen of manhood never braved the world's scorn than Adrian Dredmond at that moment; and poor Brownie, although in "durance vile" above them, might well look hopefully into the future, which should be passed by the side of such a noble defender as this.

Turning to Sir Charles he made a signal for him to follow

him, and then, with a haughty bow to the assembled company, he withdrew.

"Charles," he exclaimed, seizing his friend's hand when they were alone in the hall, "will you lend me your aid in this trouble? Something is wrong," he went on speaking, in tones of anxiety; "she was expecting me to come to her, and I know she would never have gone away of her own accord."

"I am constrained to take that view of it now, after what you have told me; although I must confess, before you came, I was inclined to believe the very worst of her. I hope," he added, with some uneasiness, "that you have not been deceived in Miss Douglas."

Adrian's lips curled again.

He knew what he had reference to. Sir Charles believed that something must be wrong or Mrs. Coolidge would not have spoken as she had done.

"The future will disclose whether I have or not," he replied, coldly.

"You may depend upon me, Adrian, to do all in my power to unravel this mystery. Miss Douglas certainly appeared like a very lovely person, and until to-night I admired her very much, although I have rarely met her. Believe me you have my sympathy," and he meant it in more senses than one.

"Thank you, but I am wild in trying to think what has become of the poor child. I am almost tempted to believe——"

He checked himself suddenly.

He was upon the point of saying he feared treachery on the part of the Coolidges; but remembering that it would not do to speak of them thus in Sir Charles' presence, he stopped.

"What?" Sir Charles demanded, with a curious look.

"I do not know what to believe," Adrian said; then added, suddenly: "You may think what you choose concerning what I have told you to-night, and the world may say what it will, but Miss Douglas is of unexceptional parentage, *and I shall marry her just as soon as I am fortunate enough to find her.*"

After a few more minutes spent in consultation as to the best means of seeking for the lost one, Adrian departed, his heart filled well nigh to bursting with grief, insulted affection, and anxiety.

He had come with a heart beating high with hope and love, with not a thought but that he should clasp his darling in his arms, and, with Lady Ruxley's co-operation, be able to place her in a position befitting her station until he could marry her. He had brought a little ring set with a single glittering stone of purest water, with which he had hoped to seal their vows, and now, as he carried it away with him, it seemed like a silent mocker of his woe.

To have found his darling and won her love, only to lose her so soon again, and under such mysterious circumstances, was a terrible blow to him, while the worst of all was the fact that he did not know which way to turn to seek her.

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"Mamma, did you ever hear anything like it?" demanded Isabel of her mother, as soon as they could excuse themselves from the drawing-room and retire to their own rooms.

"No; things are getting terribly mixed up, it seems to me. How, when, *where* did he meet her again, I wonder?"

"I have it," said Isabel. "Lady Ruxley attended the dinner

at Dunforth Castle; of course her companion accompanied her, and they met there. It must have been quite recent, I judge."

"Well, he won't find her again for one while, that is sure," returned Mrs. Coolidge, with a savage glitter in her eyes.

"Oh, mamma, you look almost as though you would like to kill her!" Isabel exclaimed, in a frightened whisper.

"I believe I wish she *had* died before she ever saw Adrian Dredmond," she answered, vindictively. "To think that *she* should win *him*, while *you* will only be a *baronet's* wife!"

Isabel flushed angrily.

"That all comes of papa's picking up a nobody with a pretty face and a glib tongue," she said.

"Let us go and see how it fares with her now; methinks the proud beauty will be somewhat humbled by this time. But humbled or not she will have to stay there until after your marriage, for if Mr. Dredmond should find her now, there would be an end to all your fine plans," said Mrs. Coolidge, moving toward the draped door.

She shoved the heavy bolt, and the two women entered Brownie's prison.

They found her sitting upon the floor near the door, looking pale and wan.

The light which they bore blinded her eyes at first so that she could scarcely see, but she arose as they entered and stood in haughty silence before them, and holding the precious casket tightly clasped in her hands behind her.

"Well, how do you like your place of retirement? Quiet,

isn't it?" sneered Isabel, while she began to walk about the place as if to examine it.

The insulted girl deigned her no reply.

"Miss Douglas, I have come to make one more appeal to you. Are you willing to accede to my terms?"

"*No, madam!*"

"Will nothing move you? Cannot I persuade you, under any circumstances, to let Isabel retain those jewels a while longer, and you keep silent about them?"

"You cannot, madam; there is a limit to human endurance, and I have reached that limit."

But scarce were the words spoken when she uttered a cry of pain and dismay.

Isabel had glided stealthily around behind her, and with one powerful blow had dashed the casket from her hands.

The next instant, and before Brownie could turn to prevent her, she had captured it, and with a low, mocking laugh, glided from the place.

She had struck the arm that had been broken, and being weaker than the other the blow had benumbed it, causing her to release her hold upon the casket and to cry out with pain.

With all her spirit roused to battle, Brownie sprang to follow the artful girl, but Mrs. Coolidge barred the way.

"No, no, miss, you cannot leave this place to-night; you are in too dangerous a mood," she said.

"What do you mean by detaining me here?" Brownie demanded, almost passionately.

"I mean just what I said, that you are too dangerous to be

let loose to-night, unless you will solemnly promise not to make any trouble for us."

"You are very much mistaken if you think you can make any such terms with me, Mrs. Coolidge. I do not fear you in the least, and unless you restore my jewels, and let me go at once, I shall make such trouble that you will rue it until your dying day."

And Mrs. Coolidge knew she would do it; she saw that she had aroused a spirit stronger than her own; she quailed before it, and knew that victory for her could only be gained in one way—to keep her under lock and key until after Isabel's marriage. Then she would not care what she did.

"You do not fear me, and I have power to keep you here indefinitely?" she retorted, flushing angrily.

"That may be, but there will come a day of reckoning sooner or later, Brownie replied, dauntlessly. "You do not suppose," she added, scornfully, "that in this nineteenth century you can keep me concealed for any length of time. I shall be missed, if I am not already, and the whole house searched for me."

"You *have* been missed, and the whole house and grounds *have* been thoroughly searched for you, but no one has thought of looking *here* for you, Miss Douglas," Mrs. Coolidge replied, with a malicious gleam of her eyes.

Brownie's heart sank, and she grew whiter about the mouth at these words, but she would give no outward sign of the growing fear in her heart.

"May I ask how long you intend to keep me in solitary confinement? You are aware, perhaps, that people cannot live

very long shut up in a dark place like this," she said, thinking to frighten her into letting her go.

The woman started. She had not thought of its being solitary confinement before, and it was a good while before the grand wedding would come off.

She meditated a moment before replying, then she said :

"I will endeavor to see that you do not suffer, Miss Douglas, but I must keep you here for the present. Undoubtedly you know that Isabel is to marry Sir Charles Randal very shortly, and I am resolved that nothing shall interfere with that match. If I should let you go now, you would raise such a breeze for us that everything would be upset. There is only one condition upon which I would release you," she concluded, with a searching look into the young girl's face, and really feeling anxious to let her go, if she would only keep silence.

"What is that?" demanded Brownie, quickly.

"That you would go quietly away from Vallingham Hall and conceal yourself from everybody until after the wedding; then, I promise you, we will return the jewels to you."

The delicate lips curled, and the lovely eyes flashed ominously.

"Will you?" asked her enemy.

"No! *I will not yield to you in a single point!*" was the haughty reply.

"Very well, there is nothing more to be said, then. I will arrange a good bed for you, give you plenty of books and papers to read, and bring you food three times a day. You shall have plenty of candles, too, so that I imagine you will

manage to exist quite comfortably for a few weeks," and she left the room as she spoke.

A few weeks!

Would she dare keep her there so long? Brownie thought, with a sinking heart.

Meanwhile, what would Adrian think—what would they all think had become of her? Even her strong, proud spirit trembled before such an appalling prospect, yet she never thought of yielding.

Mrs. Coolidge soon returned, and Isabel with her, bringing a mattress, bed-clothes, and a tray containing a dainty supper, the former having taken care to provide it, knowing that her prisoner had been long without food. They also brought her a chair, and left her a candle, and then retired, leaving her somewhat anxious for the future, but by no means subdued.

"We'll bring her to terms before many days—never fear," Mrs. Coolidge said to Isabel, before going to her own room.

"I don't know about it, mamma; she is the spunkiest thing I ever saw in my life."

"Pshaw! After two or three days of that kind of life she will be glad to go away and hide herself until after the wedding."

"But would you trust her now?"

"Yes; she'd never promise unless she meant it, and she'd keep her word," was the tribute which this bitter foe paid to the young girl's strong, true spirit.

Left to herself, Brownie's first work was to eat her supper, for she was really very hungry, and the inner man thus strengthened she felt somewhat more cheerful.

She arranged her bed, for she was very weary with sitting for so many hours upon that stone floor, and then retired, feeling rather lonely and sad, but confident that the Lord, her shepherd, would care for her there as tenderly as in her own room; and ere long she was sleeping soundly.

She never knew how long she had been sleeping, for her rest had been unbroken and dreamless, but she was suddenly awakened by a cold clasp upon her hand!

In an instant every sense was unlocked, and she was broad awake, with that instinctive consciousness of a horrible presence, which people sometimes have when danger lurks near.

The candle still burned, and lighted the place with a reddish glare, for she had not extinguished it, feeling that the darkness would have been too horrible, and by its light she could distinguish a strange-looking object kneeling by her side.

With a cry of terror she started up to find herself face to face with a form so misshapen, so frightful, so weird and uncanny, that the sound suddenly died upon her lips, and left her paralyzed with fear.

The creature immediately arose and moved away from her a pace or two at seeing her so terrified.

"Have I frightened you? I am so sorry, and yet I might have known. But do not fear, I would be the last person in the world to harm you," were the words which greeted her ears, in tones so soft and gentle that Brownie involuntarily raised her eyes, and was at once reassured, though still so weak and trembling from her first fright that she could not speak.

He—for he was dressed in man's apparel, though so misshapen as to scarcely resemble a human being—had turned, so

that the light struck full upon his face, and was looking down upon her with a pair of the saddest gray eyes she ever saw.

His face was pale and haggard, and his lips perfectly colorless, but there was a smile of patient sweetness upon them that went to her heart at once.

His forehead was high and broad, and surmounted by hair which was perfectly white, although his general appearance did not indicate that he could be more than twenty-one or twenty-two years of age.

His head was very large for the rest of his body, and rested forward upon his breast, while his shoulders came up so high that he seemed to have no neck at all; one hand hung limp, withered, and helpless by his side, while one foot and leg were twisted entirely out of place, the heel being where the toe should be.

Ah! he was a sad-looking object, but Brownie felt no fear of him now.

He had a true, good face, full of intelligence and mental power, and while she looked into it, a great pity came into her eyes, and the tears involuntarily started.

He was quick to read her sympathy, for he said, with his sad smile:

"Thank you; I see you don't fear me any longer."

"Oh, no," she answered, gently; "but I did not think any one could get in here, and I was startled at first."

"I ought to have been more careful, but I did not like to speak loud enough to wake you, lest I should be heard," and he glanced toward the door.

Then he added:

"Can you trust me sufficiently to let me take you out of this miserable place? I came to release you."

"Can you? will you?" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Oh, yes, I can trust you fully!"

He seemed gratified by her confidence, and smiled again, while his eyes rested admiringly upon her now bright face.

"But how did you get in here?" she asked, the next instant.

"I have been here many times, and yet I never entered by that door," he answered, pointing to the door by which Brownie had come in, and speaking somewhat bitterly.

"But how did you know I was here?" and she looked perplexed, for she could not detect so much as a rat-hole anywhere.

"I overheard all that passed between you and those women," he answered, with a nod in the direction of Isabel's room.

She looked more astonished than ever.

"Come this way and I will explain it all to you," he said.

He stooped and picked up the candle, and then moved with difficulty to the opposite end of the cell.

Holding the light close to the floor, he continued:

"Do you see that semicircular block of stone about a foot and a half in diameter?"

"Yes."

"And what looks like a huge iron bolt set close to that small round shaft of stone which runs clear to the ceiling?"

"Yes."

"If you will step upon that block, and press your foot firmly upon that bolt, you will find that this stone pillar will begin to slide slowly down. When you have descended about four feet you will see a short flight of stone steps; step upon these and

this shaft will return to its place. Follow the stone steps and they will lead you to a comfortable room ; I left the door open, and there is a light within, so that you will have no diffiulty in finding the way."

"But you—you will have to remain here," Brownie said, hesitatingly.

It all seemed so wonderful and mysterious to her, that for a moment she could scarcely comprehend it.

"As soon as the shaft returns to its place, I will join you ; only one can go at a time, because the platform is so narrow," he replied.

"How strange ! it does not look as if there were any possible way of escape from the place," she said, closely examining that end of the cell.

"No ; the trap was very cunningly planned, probably when the old castle was first built, and this shaft looks as if it was only a pillar to support the roof. You perceive there is one upon each side of the cell, but only this one has the bolt at the base."

"Why do you suppose it was made so?" Brownie asked, curiously.

"Probably as a place of concealment, or a way of escape, in case of troublous times in the country. Of late years it has been used as—but never mind that now," he suddenly checked himself, and then added: "Have you courage to step upon that narrow platform and go down alone?"

Brownie lifted her clear eyes once more and searched his face before replying.

It was a noble countenance, and full of marks of pain and

patient suffering, and while she looked it seemed suddenly to grow strangely like some other face which she had seen, but whose she could not at that moment recall.

"Yes, I will go," she said, and stepped upon that semicircular block of stone.

"You will only be alone for a moment," he said, "for I shall follow you immediately; now lean close against the shaft. There! now plant your foot upon the bolt—so. Now you are all right."

Brownie obeyed his directions without a fear, for she saw that he was only intent upon serving her, and she felt herself gliding slowly and smoothly downward.

A moment more and she found herself in another dark closet, or passage, from which a short flight of stone steps led up to an open door, through which a light shone, dimly lighting the place.

She stepped from the platform upon the stairs, and the shaft instantly began to ascend again.

Following the stairs she soon found herself, as she had been told, in a large, airy, and comfortable room.

The walls were hung with ancient and faded tapestry, but the floor was carpeted with bright warm colors, and the room was quite tastefully furnished.

It was lighted by two tall wax candles in silver candlesticks, and a cheerful fire burned in the grate. There were several bookcases well filled with nicely bound volumes, and a few fine engravings with some beautiful drawings hung upon the walls.

She had not time for a more minute survey of the apartment, for she was rejoined by her strange companion.

He smiled at her look of wonder and curiosity, and after shutting and locking the door, and dropping the tapestry over it, said:

"Now I will explain how I happened to know that you were in trouble and needed assistance."

He moved a few steps further up the room, thrust aside another portion of the hangings, and Brownie saw the same shaft or pillar of stone that she had seen in the cell. At the right of it she also saw that a portion of the stone wall had been hammered or chiseled away, until only a very thin surface divided the two rooms, and this had been punctured full of tiny holes, through which could be seen the light of the candle which they had left behind; and yet from the room they had just left nothing of this could be detected.

"Ah! I see," Brownie said, and then she remembered her confidence in the good Shepherd, while she reverently acknowledged His hand in leading her forth from her captivity.

"Yes," the young man replied, while a look of infinite pain swept over his features, "it is always very quiet here, and to-night while reading I was startled by the sound of voices and a low, mocking laugh coming from this direction. Much astonished, for nothing like it has ever happened before, I threw down my book, crept to this spot, and listened. Although I could not see very distinctly, I could hear, and soon discovered that some one had been forced into yonder cell to cover up some dark deed or other. I learned that your name is Miss Douglas, and that you possess a very brave spirit, for you refused to yield to your tormentors, when most young ladies would have begged and prayed to be let out upon any terms."

He concluded with another glance of admiration.

Her lips curled in a little mischievous smile, as she wondered how Isabel and her mother would feel the next time they unbolted that door, and found their bird flown!

"But I don't see how you got the shaft down to those stairs," she said, in perplexity. Her spirits were rising every moment.

"It works in the same way from this room that it does from the other; only when it got down, I moved around to the opposite side without stepping off, and then, not pressing upon the bolt, it arose to its place again. I thought it best for you, however, to come up by the stairs, fearing you might fall from the platform if you moved," the young man explained.

"How came these holes punctured here, and this stone cut away so?" she asked, feeling deeply interested in the strange piece of machinery and that riddled wall.

"There is a sad story connected with that, Miss Douglas, which I fear it would do no good to relate," was the pained reply, while the white face flushed a sudden vivid crimson

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HERBERT RANDAL.

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be inquisitive, or to arouse any unpleasant memories," Brownie hastened to say, but she looked somewhat disappointed, as well as embarrassed.

He saw it, and, after a moment's thought, continued, speaking more to himself than her:

"During the last few years of my life I have been led to recognize a higher power as guiding my life, and I have been praying that its bitterness might be removed. I am not sure but what that prayer is beginning to be answered by the events of to-night, and your presence here. So why should I not tell you?"

Then, with sudden decision, he went on:

"Miss Douglas, this place has been my home all my life. Yes," as he saw her look of surprise, and speaking with great bitterness, "a galley slave is scarcely more of a prisoner than I have been ever since my unfortunate birth. I have never seen the outside of these buildings, excepting four blank walls which inclose a small court; I know not what my surroundings are, what my country is like, and, beyond my own attendants, scarce have seen the face of a human being. I think I must have been born with a deformed disposition as well as a distorted body; for, as a child, I was subject to fits of passion, so furious and of such long duration, that those who had charge of me deemed me insane and unsafe for the time, and used to confine me in yonder cell until I came to my senses. The bolt, you perceive, can be fastened on this side, so that the shaft will not

move, and I could not get out until they released me. I used to grow frightened and almost idiotic shut up in that dismal place with its sepulcher-like stillness, and I really think that in those days I *was* more brute than human. I was like that poor child in the Scriptures, whom his father took to Jesus to have the evil spirit exorcised, only I had no father to lead me to the Great Healer of souls, or everything might have been very different. It is only through the Saviour's own great love and mercy that I found Him at all. Oh! I wonder what it is like for a child to have the love and care of a father and mother, brothers and sisters! I have read of it, and it seems like heaven to me!"

His voice, as he said this, was like the passionate cry of some lost soul longing for Paradise, and Brownie could see that his hands were locked in pain, and that his forehead was covered with moisture caused by his anguish. Her heart bled for him, and she longed to comfort him. But what could she say? She did not even know his name, nor the circumstances which had so isolated him from all humanity, or denied to him the comfort of kindred ties. He turned toward her, and seeing the pity in her eyes, said:

"Forgive me for disturbing you with my sorrow—it *will* overcome me at times. But, as I was saying, I used to think I should die shut up in there away from every one; so, after my passion exhausted itself and I was let out, I used to busy myself, when I was alone in this room, by cutting away this wall, and puncturing these holes; and then when they put me in there, I would creep close to this spot, and, with my ear against these holes, I could hear what was said and done here, and did not feel quite so lonely and wild."

A shudder seemed to shake his whole frame at the remembrance of those fearful days.

"No one but yourself," he continued, "knows to this day that the wall has been mutilated thus. It is several years now

since these holes have been serviceable to me, for the evil spirit within me was long ago exorcised, since when I have been clothed and in my right mind," he concluded, with his sad, sweet smile, which to Brownie began to be very beautiful.

But the more she heard him talk, the more she wondered who he could be—this sad young cripple, who was so gentle, yet repulsive, so intelligent, yet to all appearance scarcely human. She looked at her watch, and found it was four o'clock. The young man, noting the act, suddenly said:

"How thoughtless in me, Miss Douglas, to keep you standing all this time. I suppose you will be obliged to remain here until daylight, as there is no way for you to get back into the Hall except by going outside from here, and of course it will be useless to attempt that until the household are astir. If you can be comfortable here for an hour longer, I will do my best to entertain you. I have books, and all the latest periodicals, and there is an easy-chair by the fire, which I know you will enjoy."

He led her toward the fire, which really made the somewhat dismal apartment very cheerful.

She thanked him, and sat down, taking the book of fine engravings which he offered her.

She looked at one or two of the pictures, but she seemed to have no interest in them.

Her thoughts were filled with this young man; she longed to know more of his sad history, and why his life had been rendered such a blank.

It could not be that he was really insane, and that it was necessary to confine him thus! *Was she with a madman?*

The thought for the moment startled her so that she actually felt faint. But, no; one look into that calm, patient face, with its deep, intelligent eyes, completely banished all fear, and left her more in the dark than ever.

"You are very weary," the young man remarked, seeing her listless attitude.

"No," she answered, smiling; "but I am wondering how my explanation regarding my absence and sudden reappearance will be received by Lady Ruxley."

"Ah! I had not thought of that," he replied, with a painful start, and a vivid flush crimsoning his white face.

Brownie saw that he was very much disturbed by her words.

"You are an inmate of the family, then?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"I am companion to Lady Ruxley, although before coming to her I was governess in the family of that woman who entrapped me into yonder cell," and she then related to him something of her troubles with Mrs. Coolidge.

"And it is *her* daughter who is to marry m—— Sir Charles?" the young man asked, deeply interested.

"Yes."

"Is she anything like her mother?"

"Very much like her," Brownie said, dryly.

"A fine wife he will have, I fear!" he answered, with curling lips.

"I am very sorry for him," the young girl replied, gently.

"He is very nice, I expect," said the cripple, his lips quivering painfully, while he shaded his face with his hand.

"He is indeed a very fine young man, I am told."

"Would you mind telling me what he is like?" and Brownie wondered why his tones were husky and tremulous.

She described him as well as she could, and concluded:

"To sum it all up, he is very handsome, and as good—they say—and noble in proportion."

A heavy sigh was the only reply, and then he appeared to be sunk in reverie.

After an awkward silence, he suddenly aroused himself, and said:

"Miss Douglas, you and I are both placed in a very trying position by the events of to-night. It did not enter my mind

that any explanation would have to be rendered as to your release from yonder cell, although I should not have hesitated an instant about aiding you had I thought of it. I see now that some account of it will be necessary, but I must tell you frankly that it will bring the direst confusion upon the inmates of Vallingham Hall, when you return and make known the fact of your imprisonment and the manner of your release."

"I expected it would be somewhat embarrassing to Mrs. Coolidge and her daughter, but how else will it bring confusion?" Brownie asked, wonderingly.

"Because it will have to be known that I was instrumental in it, and there are but two or three people in the world who know of my existence; consequently it would involve some very awkward explanations on the part of at least one individual, and that is my own mother. Miss Douglas, my name is *Herbert Randal!*"

"What! are you Lady Randal's son?" demanded Brownie, in astonishment.

"Yes; and Sir Charles is my own brother, although I have never yet looked upon his face; neither do I remember having seen my mother more than half a dozen times in my life," he replied, with intense bitterness.

"Impossible! Why, it is too horrible!" ejaculated the young girl, more and more astonished and shocked.

"It is even so. It does not *seem* possible that a mother could so far forget her motherhood as to willingly condemn her own flesh and blood to what I have been doomed ever since my birth; but it is true, nevertheless. I was born abroad while my mother was traveling one summer, but I was such a misshapen mass of humanity that she went into convulsions upon first beholding me, and has seldom been able to bear the sight of me since. While my father lived I was kept out of the country, and I do not believe that even he knew of my existence; but after his death my mother had me brought here, and hired an

old woman and her son to take care of me until I was about fourteen years of age. They often abused and ill-treated me, and I think perhaps it was owing to this that I was so ungovernable at times. Since that time a broken-down professor has had the principal charge of me and my education. He has been paid a high salary upon the condition that he would never betray his trust. I think he would be glad to see me in different circumstances, but he has an invalid sister depending upon him, and he has no other means of support. He has been very kind to me, and has done the utmost to train my mind aright, thus giving some brightness to my otherwise blighted life; but I have been kept a close prisoner all my days. I am never allowed to go out, except under circumstances of the utmost secrecy, and then only into a little court hemmed in by the blank walls of these buildings, and I live here in this secret chamber, unknown to all but my mother, my tutor, and my servants."

"Dreadful!" murmured Brownie, almost moved to tears by the sad recital.

"You may well say that. It is dreadful to be shut up from the beautiful world—for I read of its beauties if I cannot see them; but it is *more* dreadful to be shut away from all affection and kindness. In my youth I could not patiently bear it, and gave way to those fearful outbursts of passion of which I have told you. If my father were living, things might be different, for I have heard that he was a good man. My brother I have never seen, and I suppose he does not dream of such a thing as a relative like me; and while my mother not only cannot bear the sight of her crippled son, she is also ambitious that the one who *is* a credit to her should profit by all the advantages possible. I have heard that my brother, like my father, is a true and noble man, and I long to know him, and there has always been a faint hope in my heart that that longing might be gratified. My first thought when I resolved to release you tonight, was that perhaps the event might open a way of escape

for me also, and that I could go away by myself and no one ever know who I am. But your connection with Lady Ruxley, and your having been an inmate of the family, will make it necessary that my agency in the matter be explained. Of course, in order to justify yourself, you will have to tell how you came to be shut up, and the next inquiry will be, 'how did you get out?'"

"I see," said Brownie, with curling lips; "and if I proclaim the fact that a young man by the name of Herbert Randal, who has also been kept a close prisoner for over twenty years by a heartless mother's decree, liberated me, it is going to make it very uncomfortable for Lady Randal. Pardon me," she added, flushing a lovely color, and dropping the scorn out of her voice, "but I honestly believe the time has come when it is right that the world should know of your existence, and that *you* should know something of your kindred and the world in which you live. It is fearful to think that you have never been outside these walls!" she concluded, indignantly.

"I sometimes go to a little old chapel, which incloses one side of the little court of which I have spoken. It must have been a beautiful place before it was abandoned for the larger ones, and left to fall to decay. I found an entrance to it through the vaults, and I sometimes go there to read. I might have escaped long ago in that way had it not been for my tutor, whom I knew would be reduced to the most abject poverty if deprived of his situation, and so pity has kept me here."

"But you might go out and assert your rights. Of course, a portion of all this property would fall to you, and then you could see that he did not suffer," interposed Brownie.

"Yes, I might do that, and perhaps thereby gain the hatred of my brother. I want his love—oh, I crave the love of some human being!" he cried, almost passionately; then added, reverently: "And so I am waiting God's time to give me what is best."

"He has sent you a friend at all events, if you will allow me to be such," Brownie said, impulsively, and reaching out her hand to him, while two bright tears rolled over her flushed cheeks and dropped upon her black dress, where they glittered like diamonds set in jet.

"Ah! then this *is* the beginning of good things for me, and I will accept it as a precious omen," he replied, clasping her hand warmly, and his eyes lighted with a deep and sudden joy. "I do not mean to complain," he added, a moment after, "for I have many things to be thankful for, and I thank my Maker every day that He gave me this ugly body rather than a blunted intellect; for the latter I can cultivate and enjoy here, while He will give me a glorified body in the future when He calls me into His kingdom. I have other comforts, too. Lady Randal provides bountifully for me. I have my books, and moderately good health, though that would be better, I think, if I could be more in the air. But I try to feel that all my privations are sent to teach me some great lesson in life, and fit me for better things."

Brownie felt that he had indeed learned more than one great lesson in life in the faith and patience which his words betrayed, and she could scarcely refrain from weeping as she looked into his face, which seemed almost glorified at that moment by the beautiful spirit within him.

She sat in deep and perplexed thought for several minutes. There were evidently only two things which she could do; either leave the Hall altogether and hide, as Mrs. Coolidge had proposed, letting her disappearance still remain a mystery, or boldly face them all, and let the guilty suffer for their own wrong-doing.

And still, should the fact become known that Lady Randal had such a son, and had wickedly concealed it, depriving him of all that makes life worth the living for so many years, what a tempest it would raise about her head! and, if she were capable

of such a crime, might she not do worse and wreak fatal vengeance upon her already unhappy victim?

Should she go away and hide?

For a moment, as she looked into that patient, suffering face opposite her, she thought she would, as it was evident that he was much more disturbed as to the issue of the matter than he liked to own.

But, Adrian! What would *he* think of her stealing away and hiding herself from him?

And she knew well enough if she should make these things known to him he would instantly take measures to right this terrible wrong. She *knew* he would not allow it to remain longer concealed. She began to grow very nervous about the dilemma.

Herbert Randal read something of these struggles in her troubled face.

"I do not see that there is but one course for you to pursue, Miss Douglas," he said, "and that is to explain everything in a straightforward way. Perhaps if you could conceal the fact from all but the immediate family that it was Lady Randal's *son* who released you, it might save some scandal."

"Do you not think it right and just that that fact be made known?" Brownie asked, gravely, adding: "I shall never rest content until I know you are at liberty to go and come at your own will and pleasure, and have your rights."

"You are very kind; but when the proper time comes, there is One who will see to it that justice is done."

"Yes, and I think He has taken this way to accomplish it—He has sent me to be your liberator," she said, smiling.

"Like the angel to Peter," he replied, quickly, his eyes devouring her lovely face as if he almost deemed her an angel. He had never seen aught so beautiful before.

"I don't know," he added, wistfully; "it may be this is the way it is to be done. However, I shall leave it all to your own

judgment. If it is necessary to establish your character and justify yourself, of course the secret will have to come out. You can judge how much of an explanation will be necessary as soon as you return to the Hall. And now, as daylight is approaching, will you trust yourself to me a little longer? I shall be obliged to take you from here by a secret way, since the other doors are all locked, and the professor has the keys in his keeping."

"Certainly, I shall trust you," Brownie replied, frankly.

"Are your nerves strong?" he asked, with a grave, troubled face.

"Oh, yes," she returned, smiling, yet wondering if some new adventure awaited her.

"You remember I told you that I sometimes go to a little old chapel, and that the entrance to it from here is through the vaults—it was through the *dead vaults*, I meant."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young girl, growing pale and sick with the thought, and she shivered as if an icy hand had touched her.

"I was afraid you would shrink from it, but there is no other way, and it would not do for you to remain here much longer, for the servants will soon be in. If you would blindfold your eyes, I could lead you, and you need not experience anything unpleasant," he suggested, timidly.

"No," she returned, with a proud uplifting of her small head; "it will undoubtedly be very unpleasant, but I know the *dead* cannot harm me; and you say you have been this way before?"

"Yes, many times."

"Then let us go at once and have it over with," she answered, rising, and he saw her shiver again.

He took the candle, and sweeping aside a portion of the tapestry hangings, revealed an iron door. He asked her to draw back the bolt and push the door open.

She did so, and saw a flight of stone steps.

He limped down these, she following, and soon came to what appeared a grated window.

He told her to slide back the grating, when she would see another bolt which fastened the window.

She obeyed, and slipping the bolt, the window swung open on hinges, when, descending two or three more steps, they found themselves in what he had called a court, but what was in reality a small, ancient burying-ground, surrounded on three sides by the walls of the Hall, and on the fourth by that of the old chapel.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BROWNIE LIBERATED.

"You would not suppose that Vallingham Hall concealed such a spot in its very heart, would you?" Herbert Randal asked, as they stepped into the court.

"No; it is an enigma to me even now."

"Where you have been to-night is a portion of the original buildings. The chapel and the Hall have been built around this square, and, as you perceive, there are no windows overlooking the place, which was once used as a burial ground, although nearly all evidences of that have disappeared."

"Take care!" he cried, as she stumbled and nearly fell over a grave; "I did not think we were so near that. It seems strange that it should remain when all the others have disappeared."

He halted for her, for her sudden fall, the weird place, to-

gether with the night of excitement, made her so weak and trembling that she could scarcely walk.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, pityingly.

She shook her head and tried to smile courageously, but he saw that her lips were white and quivering.

He realized at that moment more keenly than ever before his own helplessness, and he longed with a bitter agony for that physical strength and activity which he had been so cruelly deprived of. He could not even offer to assist her, for it was as much as he could do to carry the candle and keep his own equilibrium.

"I fear you are not able to go on," he said, gently, as he waited for her to recover her breath.

"Yes, yes; let us hasten, please, for I feel anxious to get out of this dreadful place as soon as possible," she answered, as she tried to brace herself anew for what was to come, though she was so nervous she felt that it would not take very much to make her shriek aloud.

It was beginning to be light overhead, but, hemmed in by those towering walls, the place, with its deep-tangled grass, and damp, moldy smell, was fearfully gloomy and ghostly, while her guide, with his misshapen form, and his white waving hair, his haggard face, rendered more ghastly still in the flickering, uncertain light of the candle which he bore, made it seem like some haunted spot in which restless spirits roamed at will, and Brownie, her teeth chattering, and every nerve quaking, found herself repeating those startling words of Shakespeare:

"A tale of sorrow, for your eyes may weep;
A tale of horror, for your flesh may creep;
A tale of wonder, for the eyebrows arch;
And the flesh curdles if you read it rightly!"

When they reached the chapel there was another grating to be removed, another window, from which nearly every pane of

glass had disappeared, to be opened, and they came to another flight of stone steps.

These they descended cautiously, for they were becoming loosened from their place, and were falling to ruin, and soon found themselves in a vaulted cavern, dismal and gloomy enough for the dwelling-place of the dead.

The candle flickered and flared, giving an uncertain light, but Brownie could see the numerous shelves which were ranged along the side, each containing a silent occupant, in its moldy, worm-eaten coffin.

A gasp of fear told young Randal something of what his companion was suffering.

He halted at the foot of the steps, and said, regretfully:

"Miss Douglas, nothing but necessity would ever compel me to bring a delicate lady into such a dreadful place; and now, if I can only persuade you to put your hand upon my arm, and close your eyes, I will guide you safely through this vault, and you need never realize what is in it."

"Thank you. I will take your arm, if you please—I shall feel a little less lonely; but I think I shall need my eyes to see where to step, and I will try not to annoy you with my cowardice any more, though the sight of a coffin always did strike terror to my heart," Brownie answered, her teeth still chattering.

She laid her hand lightly upon his arm, and he thrilled at the touch.

It was a new and strange experience for the lonely boy, and one which he long lived upon in remembrance.

The abode of the dead was soon traversed, and they came to still another flight of steps.

Herbert Randal, mounting them first, lifted a trap-door, and, setting his candle down, reached his hand to Brownie, and in another moment she was standing safe, but nearly exhausted, within the altar of the chapel.

It was a very ancient-looking structure, and apparently had the capacity of seating about a hundred people. It must once have been a pleasant, attractive place, but neglect and decay were fast doing their work.

The young man made her sit down and rest, while he talked cheerfully and interestingly of the place, hoping thus to turn her mind from the horrors through which they had just passed.

After a while he arose, crossed the chancel, and led the way to a small side door, whose key was in the lock.

This he turned and pushed the door open, letting in the fresh breath of morning.

The relief which Brownie experienced was expressed by a long-drawn sigh, and, looking up into her companion's face, she smiled a wan, forced smile, as she said:

"I fear you will think me very cowardly, but indeed my nerves were nearly unstrung by excitement and anxiety before this last experience."

"Do not speak of it; I am sure you have borne it bravely. And now, if you will follow that path," he added, pointing it out to her, "it will lead you directly through this grove, around to the front of the Hall, where I think you will find no difficulty now in entering."

"Thank you. And, Mr. Randal, I feel that I owe you a great deal. I trust it will not be long before we shall meet again under happier circumstances," Brownie said, heartily, as she held out her little trembling hand to him.

He took it, while an expression of infinite sadness swept over his face, as he replied:

"If *He* wills it, we shall; if otherwise, the memory of this night will sweeten all my future life—to think that I have at least *once* been able to help a fellow-being—I, who have always deemed myself so useless and almost accursed."

"Mr. Randal," the young girl returned, very gravely, yet earnestly, "it pains me to hear you speak thus. You have done

more good than you think to-night. I have often murmured at my own lot in life, which has been by no means smooth during the past year, but you have taught me a lesson in patience, sweetness, and *faith* which I shall never forget."

His face flushed, and his eyes lighted with a beautiful radiance.

"Your words are very pleasant," he said, gently; then added, hesitatingly, yearningly: "You say you will never forget the *lesson*, as you call it, but, if I may be so bold, will you give a kindly thought now and then to one whose future can never be so bright as I hope yours may be?"

How like a funeral knell his words sounded, as if hope were dead within him; yet, withal, how submissive and resigned he was, as if beyond and over all earthly sorrows his soul cleaved to an unseen hand which was lifting him above the deep waters which had well-nigh overwhelmed him.

"I shall always remember you, and I believe we shall meet again," Brownie said, with quivering lips and eyes which were swimming in tears.

He bent and touched her hand with his lips, then, with a murmured farewell, he closed the door and went back to his loneliness and desolation, leaving Brownie standing alone in the gray dawn, a strange, deep tenderness in her heart for this poor sufferer, whom God had stricken so heavily.

She leaned wearily against the door and looked about her. She felt tenfold more dreary than when she had been shut within the cell, for she was still in some doubt as to what was best for her to do, and as to what her reception would be if she should return to the Hall.

She was cold, and weak, and faint, and it was quite a distance around to the front of the Hall, but, after a few moments spent in deliberation, she turned into the path leading through the grove.

The morning was cloudy and misty, and within the shadow

of the trees, most of which were spruce and pine, the gloom was most oppressive, while the keen air pierced her scant clothing, chilling her through and through.

She had not gone many steps when the crackling of twigs made her start nervously and look around her, and her heart stood still with fear as she beheld the figure of a man, enveloped in a long, dark cloak, coming toward her with rapid steps.

She stopped, her heart beating like a trip-hammer, and stepped behind a tree, hoping he had not observed her, and would pass on without noticing her.

Vain hope! The figure quickened his steps, coming directly toward the spot where she stood.

What to do she knew not.

If she attempted to fly he could easily overtake her. If she remained where she was, and harm came to her, no one could hear her cries and come to her aid.

She felt that her strength was failing, the strain had been so great upon her nerves during the last twelve hours that she knew she could not endure much more; but she resolved to meet this new danger as bravely as possible, and, stepping forth from her hiding-place, she went forward with dizzy brain and bated breath.

Another moment and she found herself face to face with her lover, Adrian Dredmond!

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONSTERNATION OF THE COOLIDGES.

During all those hours so full of adventure to Brownie, Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel had been sleeping heavily, for both had been well-nigh overcome with the excitement of the evening previous, and a sense of their own guilt in the matter of the young companion's disappearance.

They did not wake until quite late the next morning, when Mrs. Coolidge's first act was to order a good hot breakfast, telling the servant that she did not feel able to go down to eat with the family.

As soon as the servant departed, and she was assured that the guests were all assembled in the dining-room, she crept into Isabel's room, and together they sought their prisoner.

They drew the bolt, and pushed the door open cautiously. All was silent and dark within, for the candle had burned down to the socket, and then gone out.

They entered and called Brownie by name.

There was no reply, and with a nameless fear in her heart, Isabel rushed back into her own room, lighted another candle, and returned to explore the cell.

One glance served to show that it was empty!

But with the vain hope that all guilty people have they began turning over the mattress and bed-clothes as if they expected to find her concealed underneath them.

Then with horror, guilt, and remorse written on their faces, they stood transfixed and gazing upon each other in helpless dismay.

"Where can she be?" gasped Isabel, white as the wrapper which she wore, and shaking as with the ague.

Mrs. Coolidge shook her head and looked up at the small grated window above them.

She mounted upon the chair, and seizing one of the heavy bars, shook it.

It did not so much as move, and even had it been possible to remove it their captive could not possibly have reached the window to escape, it was set so high in the wall.

She then searched every nook and corner for some other outlet from the place; but although she stopped before each of those four small pillars, and pounded upon them with her hands, she did not discover anything which had the least appearance of a way of escape, and at last, with a cry of despair, she exclaimed:

"Isabel, I firmly believe that girl is a witch, for none but a spirit could have escaped from this dungeon!"

"Mamma," exclaimed her daughter, suddenly, "I do not believe you fastened the door last night, and she came out when we were asleep!"

"How foolish you are," was the impatient reply. "I am very sure that I shoved the bolt, and I do not believe it possible that she could have worked upon the door in any way to have slipped it back."

However, to satisfy themselves, they went out, shut and bolted the door, and then tried, by gently working it back and forth, to see if the bolt would slip.

No; it remained firm and tight, and the matter still continued to be a mystery, and a terribly tantalizing one, too.

They tried all the different doors leading from their own rooms into the corridors, but all were locked, excepting the one by which the servant who had brought the breakfast had entered, and Mrs. Coolidge had been obliged to rise to admit her, so

that they knew it could not have been possible for Brownie to have escaped that way.

They were stunned and bewildered, for it was a circumstance entirely beyond their comprehension, and it was with quaking hearts, and white, worn faces, that they at length prepared to join the family below, expecting they should be overwhelmed by something terrible.

They knew well enough if Brownie had escaped and returned to her post, that the deepest shame and disgrace awaited them.

They little thought, however, during their anxious and almost ludicrous search in the cell, a pair of keen, bright eyes had been earnestly regarding them, while it must be confessed that Herbert Randal never enjoyed anything in his life so much as their anxiety and discomfiture regarding the beautiful maiden whom he had so opportunely aided.

The two disappointed plotters were, however, somewhat reassured, upon descending to the drawing-room, to find that Brownie's disappearance was still the theme of conversation, together with the startling announcement which Adrian Dredmond had made.

Lady Randal looked anxious and annoyed, and was somewhat irritable.

Lady Ruxley was too ill to rise, being overcome with solicitude as to the fate of her companion, a fact which was received with the most cheerful resignation by most of the company, since it relieved them from the sting of her sharp tongue.

Sir Charles was very grave and preoccupied, and while he was not exactly cool, yet there was a certain dignity about him which somewhat awed his betrothed. There were some things which he could not understand, in particular, Adrian's stern words and manner to Mrs. Coolidge, which the more he thought about them the more mysterious and inexplicable they became.

Altogether it was not the happiest company in christendom

that assembled in the Vallingham Hall drawing-room that morning.

Every door that opened made Isabel and her mother quake with fear, and both would gladly have given up every jewel in their possession to have been freed from that horrible suspense.

Several days passed, and still there was no news. Their anxiety began to abate, and with every passing hour they breathed more freely, yet that puzzling, wearing question was ever before them :

"Where is she?"

The drawing-room concert, or musical soiree, came off according to appointment, but did not prove very satisfactory. It was not really a failure, but there was a lack of inspiration which made everything drag, and it was with a uniform sense of relief that at the end of the week the gay company dispersed, while Sir Charles, Lady Randal, Isabel, and her mother departed for Paris, intent upon the all-important trousseau.

The two latter were only too eager to plunge into the pleasures of the gay French metropolis, and busy themselves with the cares which the next few weeks would involve, hoping thus to drive more unpleasant thoughts out of mind.

* * * * * * *

When Adrian Dredmond recognized his betrothed in the dim light of that dismal morning, he sprang forward with a cry of joy, mingled with dismay, and folded her close within his arms, while Brownie, utterly overcome by the reaction from excessive fright to a sense of security, and that her troubles were all over, burst into nervous sobbing, and clung to him with a grip so fierce that he was startled.

"My darling, my darling, what does all this mean?" he asked, soothingly.

But she could not tell him; the floodgates were open, and the storm must spend itself ere the calm would come; the restraint which she had imposed upon herself had been so resolute

and of such long duration that, now she had once given the rein to her feelings, it was not easy to regain her self-control.

"My precious one," Adrian continued, "I have been searching for you all night long. I came hither to see you last evening, and they told me you had disappeared in the most mysterious manner. Not knowing which way to turn to find you, I started for Dunforth again in despair, but something seemed to be holding me back, and I have roamed over the park and the forest, the highways and byways, all night. As daylight approached, I resolved to return to the Hall and inquire if any clew had been gained during the night, and then I saw you coming through this grove. Dearest, how cold you are," he added, tenderly, "and how you tremble. Did I frighten you? Come back into the shadow of yonder chapel, and tell me how it is that I find you thus alone and unprotected from the cold night air."

He wrapped his cloak about her, for the mist was settling down into a fine rain, while the air grew more piercing and chill, and he almost bore her back to the door of the old chapel, where they were screened from observation and protected somewhat from the wind.

Then he strove to comfort her by every fond and endearing epithet which he could think of.

He chafed the little icy, quivering hands, and kissed the warmth and color back to her pale cheeks. But it was long before she was herself again, for now that she realized that she was safe, her strength all forsook her, and she lay almost lifeless in his arms. But at last she was able to whisper something of the story of her fearful experience, and a mighty wrath arose in his heart against the authors of it all.

"I mistrusted they might have had some hand in it last night, but they shall pay dearly for this shameless insult to you, my dearest," he muttered, between his set teeth.

Then he became suddenly silent and thoughtful, but still

holding her in his loving embrace, until she grew warm and strong again, while a sense of security and happiness began to steal over her, until she felt that she could return to the Hall, if need be, and face them all without a tremor, with him by her side.

But he had been revolving other matters in his mind. He had been greatly startled and surprised to learn that Lady Randal had another son, and had been criminally concealing it all these years, and he classed her with the others as a false and heartless woman.

He knew that Lady Ruxley was very fond of her companion, but he knew her temperament, and was unwilling that Brownie should remain longer with her in that capacity, while, after the events which had so recently transpired, he did not deem it wise to seek her as a protector for the young girl, as he had planned to do, for any length of time. He could not feel safe about her while the Coolidges were near.

Finally, he raised the beautiful face which was resting against his bosom, and, with a look of infinite tenderness, asked :

"Darling, it is settled, is it not, that you belong to me now?"

"Yes, Adrian, wholly."

His face lighted at her reply.

"And you will trust me fully, from this time forth?"

"I trust you fully," and the little hands fluttered confidingly in his.

He drew her closer within his arms.

"Then, little one—my Brownie, will you come to me now, and let me make you my own wife to-day—or at least as soon as that is possible? I feel that I cannot allow you to be exposed to such suffering and insult for another hour."

He felt her heart leap against his own at his words, but she did not reply.

"Darling," he questioned, "am I putting your love and faith in me to too severe a test?"

"To-day! so soon—oh, Adrian!" she whispered, and he could see wave on wave of rich color surging up over her lovely face.

"Will you love me better by waiting a week—a month—or a year?" he asked, gravely.

"No, oh, no!" she said, quickly.

"Can you bear for a moment to think of going back to the old life?"

She had not thought of its being repulsive before, but it suddenly came to her that it would be very hard, and no matter how kind Lady Ruxley might be, she could never return as a servant into that family again.

She did not speak the thought, but she nestled closer to her lover, and he answered for her:

"No, dear, you cannot, and you have nowhere else on earth to go, but to the one who loves you best. Brownie," he continued, with tender authority, "you are mine—you have freely given yourself to me, and now I am not willing that you should go back to face those wolves until I have an indisputable right to go with you to demand proper respect for you, and the restitution of your property, without the possibility of a repetition of the insult and suffering to which you have heretofore been subjected. I know all the objections you would raise," he went on. "I have thought them all over carefully. Lady Ruxley's anxiety upon your account; the misconstruction which will be put upon your mysterious absence; the notoriety of a clandestine marriage, etc. But I think it will do them all good to suffer a little upon your account, without it is Lady Ruxley. And as to the other reasons, I do not care a straw for them. In fact, our marriage will not be so very secret, since I announced the fact of our engagement to the whole company assembled in the drawing-room last evening, and told Sir Charles I should marry you just as soon as possible."

"Adrian! did you do that?" demanded Brownie, looking up astonished.

"Certainly I did. You do not suppose I could sit tamely by and listen to all their remarks and surmises without making an effort to silence them, do you?"

"But it was very brave and noble in you—few would have braved public opinion like that," and she lifted her red lips to give him a voluntary kiss of gratitude.

"What had I to brave, my darling? I shall be proud to call you by that dearest name in the world—wife; and since they all know now that I mean to make you such, they cannot say that you have run away with me. We will go to London to-day. I will get a special license, and you shall be my wife to-morrow."

"But—but—" she began, with a troubled face.

"No, dear," he interrupted, smiling, as he read her thought, "you shall not go alone with me. My old nurse and her daughter shall go with us to make everything proper. Nurse Clum will do anything in the world for me, and keep any secret I intrust to her. Milly, her daughter, has long been trying to get a situation as lady's maid, and we will make one for her at once, thus doing a charitable deed, as well as make ourselves happy. In a week's time, less if you desire, we will return to Vallingham Hall, claim your property, and right that other wrong; while with me by your side, you will be freed from the possibility of insult from any one. Will you go with me, dear?"

"But you have relatives, I fear——"

"I am my own master, my darling, and *no* one can say me nay upon this most vital point," he replied, gravely, yet with decision.

"I will go with you, Adrian," she said, simply.

"Bless you, my own!" he exclaimed, joyfully, then added, in tones of regret: "It is not a fitting way to wed you, I know—not as I had fondly hoped it would be, when I planned to lead you before my friends, and wed you openly as befits your

station and mine; but," he added, lightly, "when once we are settled we will make a great feast, and all shall do honor to my wife. But we must not delay longer if we would escape observation. But first, I have something for you—I brought it last evening." He then took the ring from his pocket and put it upon her finger, saying as he did so: "There, that seals our vows so far."

He then took his cloak from his own shoulders, and wrapping it closely about her, led her by an unfrequented path to the spot where he had left his carriage.

He drove directly to Nurse Clum's, where, giving his betrothed into Milly's hands to be fed and cared for, he secured a private interview with the former, told her his plans, and what he thought necessary of the circumstances which seemed to make them advisable.

The faithful old nurse shook her head when he told her that he was braving his grandfather's displeasure; but she saw he was determined upon the course he had marked out, and she could not say him nay.

Milly was delighted at the prospect of being lady's maid to a bride, and was charmed with the sweet lady who was to be Master Adrian's wife.

They took as early a train as possible from West Malling, in order to escape observation, and before noon they were all comfortably settled in London. Brownie and her two companions having an elegant suite of rooms at the Langham Hotel in Portland Place, the most fashionable quarter of the city, while Adrian returned to his own private apartments in St. James street.

Before sundown he had procured the special license, and believed himself the happiest man alive; the only cloud being the disapproval of his grandfather, and this he trusted that time would overcome.

Meantime Brownie, in company with Milly, visited a fashion-

able ladies' furnishing-house, and procured the most suitable outfit it was possible to procure at so short a notice, and gave orders for several other articles of apparel which she would need in the future.

The next morning a quiet little wedding-party alighted at St. George's Church, Hanover Square, at eleven o'clock, and leading his beautiful betrothed proudly up the grand aisle, Adrian Dredmond stopped before the gray-haired rector, and the twain were made one.

It was a very sweet but solemn face which looked up into Adrian's when he paused a moment in the vestibule and whispered, tenderly:

"God bless my own wife!"

But her eyes, as he pressed that first kiss upon her lips, were full of happiness and trust, and he knew that he had it in his power to make her life very bright. It was well for him, however, that he had not betrayed to her the fact of his grandfather's disapproval, nor what he was likely to forfeit by his alliance with her, else all the pride of a royal race would have risen within her, and that fair April day would *not* have seen Brownie Douglas Adrian Dredmond's bride!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LADY DUNFORTH'S VISIT.

Adrian Dredmond, as he had stated to his grandfather when he so wrathfully opposed his marrying, was not quite a beggar; indeed, he was entirely independent of Lord Dunforth as regarded pecuniary matters.

His mother's settlement had been the generous sum of

twenty thousand pounds, which, of course, after her death became his.

His father also had accumulated quite a handsome property, so that, if he never received a pound from Dunforth's coffers, he was able to surround his bride with every luxury, while nothing could prevent him from inheriting the title and landed property upon the old gentleman's decease, since they were entailed.

Possibly it was the consciousness of these facts which made his lordship so furious, since, had Adrian been entirely dependent upon him, it would have been almost impossible for him to marry without his consent.

But the young man sincerely loved and respected his grandfather; their wills had never clashed before, and it was a sore trial to him that they were alienated now.

The day after his marriage Adrian read in the *Times* that his lordship was in town for a few days; and he resolved to visit him and acquaint him with the step which he had taken and have the worst over with at once.

He was received kindly, yet with some coldness.

"Have you gotten over your folly, my son?" the old man asked, regarding the bright, handsome face keenly.

"No, my lord; instead, I came to tell you that I have only gotten deeper into it," was the grave yet quiet reply.

"What do you mean, sir?" and Lord Dunforth got quite red in the face at this answer.

"I mean, my lord, that I meant just what I said several days ago. I told you that the happiness of two lives was at stake, and that I should marry the lady I love. Sir, I found that she was being shamefully abused and insulted in her situation, and I made her my wife yesterday."

"And you *dare* come hither and tell *me* of it!" thundered the angry lord, starting to his feet.

"I could not endure to be at variance with you, sir, and I

know you would honor me for the course I have taken if you would but consider the circumstances."

"Never!" he interrupted, white with passion; "you have braved my displeasure, and now—begone! That a *Dunforth* should have stolen forth like that to marry a beggar!" and he groaned aloud.

"But, grandfather, listen——"

"*I will not,* I tell you, and I command you to begone; you are of age, and can henceforth manage your own concerns; but not one shilling of my property shall revert to you more than I can help, and I would keep the title and estate from you if I could. Go to your beggar-bride and be happy if you can—you have ruined my life. Oh, God! I thought I had suffered enough at the beginning, without this last blow to crush me," and he turned away from him with a gesture of despair.

The young man's heart bled for him, and he longed to comfort him, but he saw that his presence only excited him, and he withdrew, sad indeed, but without a single regret for the step which he had taken. He knew he had done right.

He was puzzled to know what his lordship had meant by saying he thought he had suffered enough in the beginning. He had never heard the story of his early disappointment, so he could not know to what he referred.

He sought his grandmother and related his adventures and their termination to her.

He found her very kind and willing to listen to him, and he told her all about Brownie from the time of his first meeting with her; but she, too, deemed it a mesalliance, and was deeply distressed on account of it, as well as the rupture between him and his lordship.

But Adrian was her idol—the deed was done and could not now be undone—and he was so high in his praises of his bride that she was half won over to his side before he left her, and

she promised to visit them, if she could do so without incurring the displeasure of her husband.

Three days later the happy husband and wife might have been seen sitting in their luxurious drawing-room in the Langham Hotel, where everything which love could suggest, or money procure, had been lavished upon the lovely bride.

Adrian had insisted immediately following their marriage upon her procuring an extensive and elaborate wardrobe, "befitting a lady of rank," as he laughingly said, although what that rank was he had not yet seen fit to tell her, and she was too happy, as well as too delicate, to question him upon such minor points.

Accordingly, with him to assist her, she had purchased elegant silks and velvets, costly laces and jewels, besides the many other beautiful trifles which go to complete an elaborate toilet.

Upon this particular morning Brownie was exquisitely lovely in a soft trailing robe of white cashmere, trimmed with rose-colored silk, and confined at the waist by a heavy cord and tassels of the same color. Full ruchings of costly lace surrounded her neck and wrists, and from beneath the folds of her dress peeped the tiniest kid slipper, ornamented with bows of rose-colored satin. Her hair was arranged simply, but very becomingly, for Milly took the utmost delight in her new vocation, and spared no pains to make her fair young mistress look beautiful; and no one could say, as she sits listening while her husband reads to her from the morning paper, but that the lovely bride was absolutely perfect, from the crown of her pretty head to the sole of her dainty slipper.

Nurse Clum has returned to West Malling, since she is no more needed for propriety's sake; but she did not go empty-handed by any means, for Adrian crowded her poor little purse to its fullest capacity, while Brownie bought the very nicest

black silk for a dress which she could find as a testimonial of her appreciation of the kindness which she had done her.

With all her pride in the old lordship's heir, she had been forced to acknowledge that he had made a fitting choice, and, as she confidentially told him, as he said "farewell," while there was the least bit of a twinkle in her eyes, that she was "*bound to own that he wasn't a bit too good for her, after all.*"

The little golden clock upon its bracket of carved marble chimed the hour of eleven, and scarcely had it ceased when there came a knock upon the door.

Another instant it was swung open, and the waiter announced:

"Lady Dunforth."

Brownie starts and colors violently at the name, and glances in surprise at her husband, wondering how it happens that *she*, of all others, should be the first to call upon her.

Much pleased, Adrian rises and advances to greet her ladyship, and leading her to Brownie, he says, to her increasing surprise:

"Grandmother, this is my darling. Will you love her for my sake first, until you come to know her, when, I am sure, you will love her for her own?"

The old lady had hardly seen Brownie when she was at the castle, she had been so much engaged with her company, and she would never have recognized her as the same being as she stood before her now in all her bright loveliness.

She was charmed with her!

Her quick eye took in at a single glance every item of her tasteful toilet, the delicate, clear-cut face, the tiny, aristocratic hands, and even the narrow little foot, with its arching instep; and she knew at once that she was in the presence of a true and well-born lady.

Her heart, which had been filled with dread and distress ever

since she had first known of her boy's marriage, instantly settled down into a state of restful satisfaction and delight.

Love this dainty, bewitching creature? Of course she could, and be proud of her, too! There could be no doubt, with her graceful self-possession, but that she was a lady born.

She greeted the young bride with the utmost graciousness, and said sweetly, as she kissed her:

"My dear, I do not think I shall even need Adrian's recommendation to make me love you."

Brownie concealed her amazement at this new development as best she could.

She had never dreamed that Adrian was the grandson of Lord Dunforth until that moment, and the knowledge brought with it various conflicting emotions.

She gave him one quick, surprised look, and then devoted herself to the entertainment of her distinguished guest.

Her ladyship was beguiled into a visit of an hour, and when the little clock struck twelve she started up with surprise.

They tried to persuade her to remain and lunch with them, but she courteously declined.

As she kissed Brownie again at parting, she put into her hands a large velvet case.

"I do not know what you may have already, dear," she said, "but I like a bride to wear pearls. Please accept these, with my love."

Brownie touched the spring and her lovely face flushed with pleasure as the cover flew back.

Upon their blue velvet cushion there lay a most exquisite and complete set of pearls in the loveliest design—necklace, bracelets, ear-rings, with a beautiful spray for the hair.

Adrian was very much gratified at this token of remembrance, and added his thanks to his wife's.

"I do not know how soon we shall return to Dunforth Castle, but I wish you might come to West Malling before very

long," Lady Dunforth said, wistfully, when she went away, but she did not invite them to call upon her while she remained in town. She knew it would not do.

Delicately as she had worded the sentence, Brownie felt it with a sudden pain, and knew that no invitation was conveyed in the words, and her brow grew troubled and her face very grave when they were alone again.

Adrian at once divined the cause, and knew that he must explain his position; he could not keep it from her longer.

"My Brownie is looking troubled; were you not pleased with Lady Dunforth?" he asked, drawing her into his arms.

"Oh, yes, I think she is very lovely; but, Adrian, I never dreamed that you were anything to Lord Dunforth."

"You never asked me, did you?" he asked, with mock gravity.

"Of course not—I did not like to be questioning you as to your ancestry; I supposed you would tell me all in good time of your own accord. I have heard that you were connected with a titled family, but never supposed you were a descendant of *his*, and would occupy such a high position," she said, looking rather uneasy.

"Then it can never be said that you schemed for me on that account," he replied, with twinkling eyes and an amused smile, "while I, on the other hand, have had the advantage of you all along. I have known ever since the day I first saw you that *you* were a descendant of royalty."

Brownie lifted her head and gave him a perplexed look.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean," and he laughed mischievously, "that I have heard Miss Douglas was very proud of having descended from Queen Margaret Tudor. Have you the genealogical tree, Brownie?"

"Poor auntie! But you are laughing at me, and who told you all this?"

"My friend Gordon, of course; so you see I took care to find out all about you before I made any advances."

She smiled at his pleasantry, but she was not to be diverted from the subject which occupied her thoughts.

"But—but, Adrian, why did Lady Dunforth speak in just the way she did? And why did not his lordship call with her? It would have been the right thing to do," and she searched his face with her clear eyes.

He told her as gently as he could then that when he went to seek his grandfather's consent, that knowing something regarding the circumstances of her leaving Mrs. Coolidge, he had imbibed a sudden and unjust prejudice, and had withheld his consent to their marriage.

Brownie listened with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, but her slender form was drawn proudly erect, and her little head was lifted with stag-like defiance.

"Did *you* know of this before you announced our engagement at Lady Randal's?" she demanded, when he had finished.

"Yes, darling, and if the whole world had opposed it would have made no difference. I am not a slave, nor a vacillating boy, that any one should choose my bride for me; and you are the only woman I have ever seen whom I would willingly make my wife. If my grandfather would only have listened to me while I explained your position, he would never have been so unreasonable."

"But I—" Brownie began, haughtily, but he stopped her with a kiss.

"Yes, I know, my own, that the pride of that royal race is so strong within you that *you* never would have wedded *me* had you known of this opposition; therefore I took care that you should know nothing of it until it was too late." Then he added, more seriously, as he saw that her face was still overcast: "But, my darling, what is birth or caste compared with our future happiness, even if you were *not* my equal, socially

speaking, which I contend you are? We love each other, and have no right to make ourselves miserable over what the world might think or say. You and I are satisfied with each other, are we not?" he asked, fondly.

The look which she gave him told him that she, at least, was content with him; but still knowing all that she did regarding Lord Dunforth, the knowledge that he was opposed to her marrying Adrian still rankled in her heart; though she forgot to consider that he could not know *who* she was, or that she had any connection with his former love.

"But, Adrian," she said, some time after, and when he had supposed the matter dropped entirely, "Lord Dunforth need not have been so very particular, for he himself was once betrothed to auntie, and would have married her if——"

It was now the young husband's turn to look surprised and puzzled, and he interrupted her in astonished tones:

"Dearest, what is this that you are saying?"

"It is true," she answered, smiling at his incredulity, "that he wanted to marry her, and would, but for some treachery on the part of Miss Helen Capel, who is now Lady Randal, I believe; and poor auntie loved him till the last minute of her life."

"Who told you of this?"

"Auntie herself, the very day she died, and the jewels which Isabel Coolidge has were most of them given to her in honor of her approaching marriage with his lordship."

More and more amazed, Adrian was now eager to hear the whole story, and Brownie, nothing loth, went over the whole ground, and then proved her position by reminding him of Lord Dunforth's recognition of the jewels she wore the night she attended the opera.

When she had concluded he said, with a little touch of triumph in his tone:

"I think, Mrs. Dredmond, that we are about to turn the

tables upon my proud-spirited grandsire finely, and we will prove to him that there is such a thing as being 'more nice than wise.'"

With which trite quotation he immediately sat down and wrote out a complete history of Miss Mehetabel Douglas and Brownie, and dispatched it at once to Lord Dunforth, feeling assured that this explanation would make everything all right, and bring his lordship to them in rather a more humble frame of mind than when he last saw him.

His chagrin can be imagined when the epistle was returned to him unopened, and without a word, thus showing that henceforth he wished no communication with him; and while his indignation for the moment got the better of him, he was still deeply grieved to be thus alienated from his grandfather in his old age.

But Brownie, all her pride aroused to arms, vowed within herself that the haughty earl should yet sue for her favor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BROWNIE'S LITTLE CHARGE.

Brownie was exceedingly anxious that Lady Ruxley should be informed of her happiness and safety, and would have hastened at once to Vallingham Hall to relieve her anxiety; but Adrian insisted that they would be constantly receiving callers, and after sending their cards abroad as he had done, it would not do to run away; besides, he was desirous that she should see more of the great metropolis, and mingle in its gayeties for a while. But he suggested she should write.

So Brownie wrote her ladyship an affectionate letter, telling her of her marriage, and that she would come to see her just as soon as possible, and explain everything. Meanwhile, she requested that she would keep her secret from the Randals and Coolidges until she saw her.

This duty accomplished, she gave herself up heartily to all the pleasures which Adrian planned for her.

Her spirits, which had been somewhat subdued by that dreadful experience at Vallingham Hall, rose with every passing day; she bloomed into such surpassing beauty that no one who looked into her glowing face could doubt that the world was at its brightest with her.

How strange it is that in the midst of our happiest moments dark clouds should hang over us, as if, jealous of our joy, they are eager to enwrap us in their gloom.

So it was with the fair young bride.

One day, upon returning from a stroll in Regent's Park, they had almost reached Portland Place when their attention was suddenly attracted by a shrill scream, and then by the distressing cries of a child.

Turning quickly in the direction whence the sound proceeded, Adrian saw that a woman, who but a moment before had been standing on the river's brink, had disappeared from sight, while the child of whom she had had charge was reaching out its hands toward the river, and screaming at the top of its lungs.

The young husband and wife hastened to the spot, and saw that the woman had fallen from the bank, and was lying motionless at the bottom of the stream.

Whether she had fainted, or what had caused the fall, they could not imagine, and Adrian hastened to rescue her, while Brownie, taking the little one from its elegant carriage, tenderly strove to comfort it.

A crowd began to gather around, and Adrian was assisted in

bringing his burden to a safe, dry place ; but to all his inquiries as to who she was no one could give any information.

She was evidently a nurse in some high family, as her cap and apron denoted, while the child, a little boy of about three years, was clothed with taste and elegance. He kept crying for "Nannie, Nannie," at first, and his little face wore a grieved, distressed look, as he saw her lying so still upon the ground, but Brownie removed him to a little distance, and soon succeeded in quieting him with her fond, sweet words.

The woman continued insensible, and as they could gain no clew to her identity, Adrian, fearing she had been seriously injured in falling, began to wonder what would be best to do with her.

A policeman now appeared, and advised that she be taken to some hospital, and deeming this the wisest course to pursue, the young man gave directions that she be taken to St. George's, it being the finest one in the city.

"But what will become of the child?" he asked, in perplexity, as he saw it in Brownie's arms.

"Take him to the station-house until called for," some one said, heartlessly.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Brownie, with an appealing, terrified look at her husband ; while the child, frightened at being so curiously regarded, threw his little arms around her neck and hid his face upon her shoulder.

She clasped him to her with a sudden thrill.

"Let us keep him until his parents come to claim him," she said, in a low tone, to her husband.

"But, dearest, it will never do for you to have the care of him," he returned, disapprovingly.

"Ah! Adrian, he is such a darling, I should like it. Milly will assist in the care of him, and, in all probability, his parents will claim him by to-morrow."

"That is true," he said, hesitatingly.

"I know he will be content with me, and that I shall treat him tenderly. Dear, I cannot let them take him to the station-house," she pleaded, earnestly.

Adrian himself said that was not to be thought of for a moment, and being strongly attracted toward the beautiful boy, it was finally arranged that it should be as Brownie desired, and they all returned to the Langham, while the unfortunate nurse was borne away to the hospital.

The little fellow was soon as happy as a king, and, although he talked of Nannie, seemed perfectly contented when in Brownie's presence.

She found, upon questioning him, that he was called Eddie, but she tried in vain to make him repeat his last name. Evidently he had not been taught it.

The next morning Adrian went early to the hospital, hoping the nurse would be able to converse with him and give him information regarding her little charge; but he found her raving in delirium, and the doctors said she had doubtless been seriously injured about the head in falling, and they were fearful that the accident would cost her her life.

Only one thing remained to be done now, and that was to advertise the child in the papers, which Adrian immediately did, and then strove quietly to await the issue.

Since the little one would occupy her for a few daws, Brownie persuaded Adrian to run down to Vallingham Hall to relieve Lady Ruxley's suspense, and consult with her as to the best method of securing her jewels, and of releasing Herbert Randal.

It was Saturday that the accident happened, and on Monday he departed for West Malling, where he found Lady Ruxley in her usual health, but feeling very lonely without her companion. She still remained at the Hall, where she said she should stay until the folks returned from Paris, and then they might have their grand doings to themselves and welcome.

She had received Brownie's note the day before their departure for Paris, but she had carefully guarded her secret, thoroughly believing in her, and inwardly triumphing in her good fortune.

"I knew they were humbugs from the beginning," she said, wrathfully, when Adrian told her about the jewels; "but, "and she shook her head sadly, "it's too bad for Charles to be taken in so."

"I sympathize with your ladyship," Adrian returned. "But let us hope that he may have his eyes opened before it is too late."

He then related Brownie's history from beginning to end, and though the old lady felt some uncomfortable twinges of conscience upon hearing that she was the grand-niece of that same Mehetabel Douglas who came to such grief in her own house, yet she rejoiced over the young girl's triumph and good fortune. She sniffed contemptuously when Adrian spoke of his grandfather's opposition to his marriage.

"She has just as good blood in her veins as Royal Dunforth himself, and when he gets his eyes open he'll be ashamed of being so crotchety. Humph!" she went on, with her irrepressible chuckle; "I told Helen she'd get her pay yet; and I *knew* that girl was treacherous. What a mongrel she is to appropriate the poor abused thing's jewels and wear them!—and they were Meta Douglas' too! I *thought* I had seen them before, but I didn't say a word, for Helen says I am always poking into other folks' affairs. And they hid the poor child in that wretched cell, did they?"

Her eyes glistened viciously as she said this.

"Yes; although I do not see how they dared do it," Adrian replied.

"Sir Charles shall know of this, or my tongue will be palsied before I can tell him!" she muttered, angrily, and then demanded: "Who did you say let her out?"

Adrian really dreaded relating this portion of his story, lest

the shock should be too much for the old lady. He had merely mentioned the fact of Brownie's being released by some one upon the other side of the cell, but now he broke to her as gently as he could the tale of Lady Randal's fearful sin in concealing her deformed son.

The horrified woman seemed to shrivel into smaller proportions than ever as she listened; her lips grew livid, her eyes seemed to sink into her head, and she shook like a reed.

"Has she dared do this cruel thing?" she whispered hoarsely; then added;

"I had given her credit during these later years for regretting and repenting of her former wickedness and intrigues, but it seems she is capable of almost anything. He—Herbert, did you say his name is?"

"Yes; that was what he told my wife."

"Well, he must not remain there another hour—it is too horrible!"

She insisted upon going immediately to the young man, asking Adrian to accompany her.

He was only too glad to do so, that he might tender his thanks to the poor cripple for his kindness to his darling.

Lady Ruxley appeared to know the way perfectly; for, passing through Isabel's room, she unbolted the door of the cell, and groped her way to the opposite side.

As she stepped upon that semi-circular block of stone, she explained the secret to Adrian, and bidding him follow her, she pressed her foot upon the bolt and disappeared. As soon as the shaft arose to its place, he followed immediately, and soon found himself standing by her side, in the room already described.

The young cripple was sleeping upon a couch, and had not heard them enter; but as Lady Ruxley stumped toward him with her cane, he started up, and regarded his strange visitors with amazement.

Lady Ruxley nearly shrieked aloud as she beheld his terrible

deformity, but quickly recovering herself, she moved still nearer to him, and exclaimed, in her blunt way :

"Well, Herbert Randal, thank the Lord that you are at last born into the world !"

"Madam, are you—*who* are you ?' he stammered, regarding her with nearly as much curiosity as she did him.

"I am a withered antedeluvian, as you perceive, but the heart within me is sound yet, and is capable of feeling for others' woes, if not for others' *faults.* I am Lady Ruxley, your mother's aunt."

"I have heard of you, and Miss Douglas said you were very kind," he said, gently, and regarding her bent form with a pitying eye.

"Did she ?" said her ladyship, eagerly, while her thin lips broke into a pleased smile. "Miss Douglas was a jewel."

"Miss Douglas *was,*" repeated the cripple, catching his breath, and a look of pain crossing his face.

"Yes, was ; for she is no longer Miss Douglas, but Mrs. Dredmond, and this is her husband," returned Lady Ruxley, introducing Adrian.

The two young men clasped hands, but Herbert Randal searched Adrian's face wistfully and eagerly.

The result seemed to be satisfactory, for the pained look passed, and he seemed to be assured that the young husband was in every way worthy of her whom he had wedded, and who had seemed like some bright angel to him.

And now there followed many questions and explanations, and a long conference, which resulted in Lady Ruxley deciding that young Randal should return at once with her to the villa, where he should remain until the return of the family from Paris, "when there will be a *serious reckoning,*" she concluded, with a stern, bitter look.

Herbert demurred at first, but upon being assured by Adrian

that it would be best, he at last consented, upon condition that he could induce his tutor to be party to the plan.

The tutor was summoned, and although very much disturbed at this unexpected state of things, he was really glad at heart that for the future his pupil would know the comforts of life. Lady Ruxley assured him that his salary should be continued to him during his own and his sister's life, for the sake of the kindness which he had shown his charge during the past.

So, as the matter was to be kept as quiet as possible from the servants, it was decided they should wait until evening before they made the change, when it was accomplished without exciting suspicion.

Adrian remained until the next morning, when, bidding them a kind farewell, and feeling much pleased with the result of his journey, he returned to London, taking with him Brownie's trunks, a cordial invitation from Lady Ruxley to the bride to come and visit her, and also an elegant piece of Irish point lace, that would have made the eyes of half the London belles water with envy, as a bridal present.

Lady Ruxley seemed to forget her own aches and pains in ministering to the comfort of her unfortunate grand-nephew; and she found him a most entertaining companion, for he had improved his time well, and was well read upon almost every subject. His knowledge of the world, and of men and things, was wonderful, considering that he had never mingled with people, or been outside the four walls of Vallingham Hall during his life.

She was eager for the return of Lady Randal from Paris, and yet she was somewhat anxious as to what the result of this new development would be; while she could not help feeling a little bit of triumph as she thought how astonished and somewhat chagrined her amiable niece would be when she should discover that Mehetabel Douglas would be the Lady of Dunforth after all.

"And Charles, how will he receive his brother, I wonder?" she often thought, with some anxiety. "If he is noble and manly, as I hope he will be, my fortune shall be divided between them; but if he should be unkind or ungenerous, then Herbert shall have every farthing!"

Upon Adrian's return to London, his young wife met him with the saddest face in the world, and threw herself into his arms with a heart-broken cry.

The beautiful child, whom she had so tenderly taken to her heart in its desolation, and whom she had begun to love very dearly, was alarmingly ill—dying, she feared, from what the physician said—with that dread disease, membraneous croup!

He had been taken very suddenly, almost immediately upon Adrian's departure, and, despite their tenderest care, had rapidly grown worse, until now he was wholly unconscious, and seemed sinking fast.

She had heard from his nurse that morning, but she was no better, and so no light could be obtained as to whom this beautiful little waif belonged.

Adrian was extremely shocked by this distressing intelligence, and together they returned to Eddie's bedside.

The doctor was there holding the little pulse and watching the ebbing life. He shook his head very gravely at Adrian's look of inquiry, and one glance into the little pale, distressed face, told more plainly still that there was no hope.

The child was breathing with great difficulty, and rolling his head from side to side. His beautiful eyes were partly closed, and the little lips were blue and drawn; and the tears sprang unbidden to the young man's eyes as he thought of the bright, laughing boy he had left only the day before, with not a thought of finding him thus on his return.

An hour passed with scarce any change, and still those kind watchers hovered around his bed.

But suddenly there came to them from the drawing-room sounds of confusion and eager questioning.

Adrian passes out to inquire the cause, and Brownie hears a few hurried sentences, then a sharp cry of pain, which is followed by the sudden rush of garments, and a beautiful woman of about thirty rushes frantically to the bedside, and bends, sobbing and moaning, over the dying child.

She is immediately followed by a gentleman a few years older, who, with a groan of agony, seizes the little cold hands and passionately presses kiss after kiss upon them.

Brownie comprehends at once that at last the parents have found their missing child.

"It is Sir Edgar Douglas and his wife, who have just returned from a journey into Wales," Adrian whispers, drawing his wife a little aside, and then continued: "They arrived only this morning, and were rendered nearly frantic at finding the nurse and their boy missing; but almost immediately they saw my advertisement, and hastened hither at once."

"How dreadful!" murmured Brownie, weeping with the stricken ones.

Then she hastened to minister to the little one, who seemed now to be struggling with the mighty foe; while his mother was too much overcome by her violent grief to be capable of any effort, and the father seemed like one turned to stone.

At length all is over. The head and eyes are still; the little chubby hands have relaxed their convulsive grasp, and the tortured breathing has ceased.

Brownie closes the beautiful eyes, smooths the bright curling locks back from the marble brow, and clasps the tiny hands upon the still breast, then turns to comfort the bereft mother.

It is a hopeless task, however, for she is borne fainting to another apartment, whither her husband soon follows her, having first, in reply to Adrian's offer of assistance, requested that he would arrange for [illegible] last sad rites.

For the next two days it seemed to Brownie as if this heavy cloud must forever obscure the brightness of her sky. It was so hard to have this bright little floweret die, and she mourned for him almost as bitterly as if he had been her own.

With her own hands she arrayed the perfect little form in the daintiest garments she could find; and when all was ready, Adrian laid him tenderly in the spotless shrine, which was to hold the sacred clay until it should rise again in immortal glory.

His form was like the lilies,
And his couch as pure as they
But one of God's messengers
Had borne the soul away!

He was like some pure, bright cherub, sleeping upon a couch of pearl!

Then they called the stricken parents to behold the beautiful dust, and the last sad ceremonies were performed.

The mother wept, and would not be comforted; but the father was like a block of marble, until he looked his last upon his darling's face and they bore him from his sight. Then, with one deep, heart-rending groan, he sank lifeless upon the floor, stricken down by a fatal attack of apoplexy.

It was his heir, his only treasure, and death had ruthlessly snatched him from his grasp; he had not thought that his peerless boy *could* die, so young, so bright, so beautiful, and his own heart-strings were snapped asunder.

Three days later, the feet of them that had borne his son away, took him also, and laid him by his side, while the widow returned to her home desolate.

The nurse was very ill for several weeks, but at length, contrary to all expectation, she began to recover, and in time returned to her sorrowing mistress.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ANOTHER REVELATION.

Does the reader consider the sad incidents contained in the last chapter a wearisome digression?

They are of the utmost importance to our story, as the following, which appeared a few days subsequent in the London *Daily Times*, will show:

"The nearest of kin to Sir Edgar Douglas, who was son of Sir William Douglas, son of Sir Frederick Douglas, formerly of Winship Towers, Winchester, will learn something to his or her advantage by applying to Capel & Armand, attorneys-at-law, No 47 Gray's Inn."

"What was your father's name, Brownie?" Adrian asked, lifting his eyes from the paper he had been reading.

"William Douglas."

"And what was his father's name?"

"James. But why do you ask? Shall I bring forth the genealogical tree?" she asked, mischievously.

"Yes, bring it," he said, gravely, and with something of surprise in her manner she obeyed.

"Now see if you can find the name of Sir Frederick Douglas three generations back," he said, when he had spread it out.

"Yes, here it is."

"Now who was his heir?"

"Sir William E. Douglas."

"Does the table give the name of his son?"

"No, the record of that family stops there."

"I thought likely; now what connection is, or was Sir William E. Douglas to your branch of the family?"

Brownie referred again to the chart.

"Sir William, James, my grandfather, and auntie, were all the children of Sir Frederick Douglas; and I never knew until this moment that auntie had more than one brother," Brownie said, in surprise.

"That is strange; and he was the heir to the baronetcy, too," returned Adrian; then he asked: "What is the date of his death?"

"1840. It is put here in auntie's own handwriting."

"That is thirty-six years ago. Then Sir William Douglas was your father's uncle, which makes him your grand-uncle, and just the same relation to you that Miss Mehetabel Douglas was."

"Well, what does all this mean, Adrian?"

"It means that Sir Edgar Douglas was Sir William Douglas' heir, and he being deceased, also his son and only child Eddie, there does not seem to be any immediate heir to the property, which probably is entailed, or this advertisement would not have appeared," Adrian replied, as he handed it to his wife to read.

She read it, and then turned to the genealogical table again with a flushed face. After a few minutes she looked up with a puzzled expression, and said:

"I have an idea of what you are thinking, Adrian, but I cannot quite make it out."

He took pencil and paper, and after a few moments placed the following diagram before her:

	Sir Frederick Douglas,	
Sir Wm. Douglas *Dead.*	Mehetabel Douglas *Dead.*	James Douglas *Dead.*
Sir Edgar Douglas *Dead.*		Wm. Douglas *Dead.*
Eddie Douglas *Dead.*		Mehetabel Douglas.

"According to that you are the only living relative and heir of Sir Edgar Douglas," he said.

"Do you suppose it can be true?" she asked, gravely.

"We will apply to Capel & Armand and see, dear."

Accordingly they ordered a carriage and drove to Gray's Inn, taking Miss Mehetabel's precious family tree with them.

Brownie used to have her patience severely tried in the days when Miss Mehetabel *would* descant upon her illustrious birth and ancestry, and often wished this same family tree at the bottom of the ocean, little thinking of the future good it was to bring her.

They were most kindly received by Messrs. Capel & Armand, and after listening to Adrian's explanation, and thoroughly examining the record, they fully agreed with him that Brownie was the person whom they were seeking.

They congratulated her upon her good fortune, telling her that there was a fine estate at Winchester, and also a handsome town-house, which would now become hers, and that in her own right she possessed an independent fortune.

"How strange!" Brownie exclaimed, tearfully, when they were once more alone, and talking the matter over again, "that the little darling should be of my own kin."

"It is, indeed, and I never thought of the coincidence of names when Sir Edgar and his wife came," replied Adrian.

"I am so glad that he fell into our hands, instead of strangers; yet I grieve for the poor little fellow and his father, who was just in the prime of life. It is sad that my gain must come from poor Lady Douglas' misfortune."

And the young heiress looked more sorrowful than joyous over the change in *her* fortunes.

"It is sad, dearest; and I was satisfied with my wife just as she was; but, I suppose, that this will go to prove to *Mrs. Grundy* that I have not made a mesalliance after all," Adrian returned, somewhat scornfully.

"It never rains but it pours," is the homely old adage, and the next day brought a lengthy epistle from Mr. Conrad, of Philadelphia, stating that the concern in which he had invested so much of Miss Mehetabel's property had formed a new stock company, which had assumed all the obligations of the old one, which they would cancel at their earliest convenience.

It might be some time, he wrote, before they could make over the whole amount to her, but, meantime, they would continue the interest on the whole, and make a yearly deposit in whatever bank she saw fit to designate, unless she should prefer to let her shares remain as they had been.

And, the honest lawyer added, things were beginning to look brighter to him, also, and he hoped to be able soon to do something for her on his own account.

Brownie rejoiced more on Mr. Conrad's account than on her own, since the burden which crushed him so heavily at the time of his confession, would now be in a measure lifted.

She answered his letter immediately, telling him of her fortunes and misfortunes—telling him, too, not to worry too much over her money matters, since she had found that the filthy lucre was not the most needful thing in the world ; and she closed with a cordial invitation to him and his family to visit her should they ever come to England.

One day, not long after, it was necessary for Brownie to go to Capel & Armand's to sign some papers regarding her coming into possession of the estate at Winchester.

Adrian accompanied her as far as the door, where he was obliged to leave her to transact some business of his own.

She mounted the stairs to the office, swung open the door, entered, and found herself face to face with Lord Dunforth!

He did not recognize her, for he had only seen her once while she was at the castle, and he could not associate this elegantly clad, blooming woman, with the pale, black-robed figure, who had been so attentive to Lady Ruxley's wants.

At all events, he thought her wondrously beautiful now, and wondered who she could be.

Brownie knew him instantly, and the rich color flew to her cheek, but she did not lose an atom of her self-possession.

Her manner was perfect, her language, as she conversed with the lawyers, was choice and fluent, while the little hand with which she signed the documents they placed before her, was white, and soft, and tapering—"a sure sign of a lady," his lordship, who was watching from behind his paper, said to himself.

He had never had any dealings until that day with Capel & Armand, and therefore they knew comparatively little of his lordship—they did not even know that Mr. Dredmond and he were in any way connected; but a little matter of business had called him hither, and he had happened to be there when Brownie entered.

"A remarkably lovely woman that," Mr. Capel said to him, after Brownie's departure.

"She is, indeed. Who is she?"

"She is heiress to the property of Sir Edgar Douglas, who died so suddenly a couple of weeks since."

"Ah, yes! I heard that he left no heir. That was a sad circumstance."

"It was, indeed, for his rent roll at Winchester is no mean one, and his town-house will compare favorably with the best."

"So I have been told; but how does this young lady happen to inherit them? Whose child is she?"

"Sir Edgar's father, Sir William Douglas, and her grandfather, James Douglas, were brothers, each of whom had but one child, a son, and they in turn had only one child, one a son, the other a daughter. Sir Edgar's son, as you are aware, died only a few days previous to his father, and that leaves this lady the sole surviving relative. Her own parents died, one just before her birth, the other just after, leaving her to the care of

a maiden aunt, Miss Mehetabel Douglas, who left this country many years ago, and settled in Philadelphia, U. S."

"Sir! What!" demanded his lordship, to whom this news was like a thunderbolt, which opened the old wound afresh.

"Yes, her own name was Mehetabel Douglas until her marriage; she was named for her aunt. My lord, you are ill!" said the lawyer, startled to see him grow so white, while his hand shook so that the paper he held rattled.

"No, no; go on. Then you say they are all dead, excepting this young lady?" he cried, trying with a mighty effort to steady his nerves.

"Yes, Miss Mehetabel, the elder, died less than a year ago, the young woman tells me. They were supposed to be very wealthy at her death, but a series of misfortunes deprived them of everything, and this young lady obtained a situation as governess in a family that was coming abroad. Strange, isn't it, how things work around, and that she should come here to walk right into this fortune?"

It was passing strange, his lordship acknowledged; and this beautiful young girl was the niece of his lost love, and her adopted child, doubtless.

He wished he had known of this before she left; he would have requested an introduction, and by that means he would have learned all about his lost one's life. As it was, he resolved to seek her out at his earliest convenience, and learn more of her and her antecedents.

Then there suddenly arose a thought which troubled him.

If this young lady was Miss Mehetabel's only living relative, how came Miss Isabel Coolidge by those jewels? Could it be that the poor child had been reduced to the necessity of selling them? It did not yet occur to him that she was the poor, discarded governess of whom Adrian had told him.

But no, he could not believe that a Douglas would be guilty

of parting with precious heirlooms for filthy lucre, no matter how destitute she might become.

Strange that he did not associate this tale with the one which Adrian had told him, but it did not occur to him.

"You say the young lady is lately married," he said, resuming his conversation with the lawyer, and determined to learn all he could.

"Yes, I think it is not more than two or three weeks since the event occurred."

Lord Dunforth did start now, remembering that that was about the time of Adrian's marriage. Still the truth did not enter his mind, as his next words proved.

"You say she was a governess previous. Whom did she marry? I trust she has not made a mesalliance; the Douglases are remarkably good stock. I used to know the family intimately," he concluded, with a troubled brow.

"You are right; they were always a fine family. I do not think that the young lady has brought any disgrace upon it, however, for her husband appears to be a very fine man. His name is Dredmond—Adrian Dredmond."

His lordship's face turned ghastly at this, and he looked up at the loquacious lawyer in a dazed kind of way.

He saw it all now; and his injustice and unkindness to Adrian stood out before him in its most glaring colors, while the cruelty of which he had been guilty to the child of his darling's love smote his heart with a pang which well-nigh turned the strong man faint.

"You are surely ill, my lord!" Mr. Capel said, alarmed at his appearance, and pouring out a glass of wine, he brought it to him, thinking it strange, too, that the story should affect him so.

"Thank you; it is merely a sudden dizziness, it will pass soon," he said, as he drank the wine; then, after he had re-

gained his scattered senses somewhat, he arose, bade the lawyer good-morning, and departed.

His first and only love was dead, and his heart told him that she had been true to him to the last, from the fact of her never having married.

But how could he meet her in the future and answer for all the insult and abuse he had heaped upon the child of her love.

He had called her a beggar! and his brow grew hot with shame at the thought, while he wondered if she would ever forgive him; for, of course, although she might never know of the epithets he had applied to her, she must know of his bitter opposition to her marriage with Adrian, and something of its cause.

He wondered if she had recognized him as she came into Capel & Armand's office.

"If she did, the little witch displayed wonderful dignity and self-possession. I don't blame the boy for falling in love with her," he muttered.

Then he remembered how earnestly Adrian had begged him to listen while he explained, and he would not; how he had returned unopened his letter, which doubtless contained all the information and more than he had gained to-day; and he sought his elegant home in Upper Grosvenor street, in a remarkably humble frame of mind for so proud a man.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CYNOSURE OF ALL EYES.

Lord Dunforth, without acquainting his wife of the change in his feelings, called the next day, as early as the rules of etiquette would allow, at the Langham, and desired to be shown to Mr. Dredmond's apartments.

He was informed, much to his disappointment, that Mr. Dredmond and his wife had left town for a few days.

Like all truly noble natures, when he found he was in the wrong he was willing to acknowledge it, and anxious to atone as far as lay in his power; but nothing remained now but to wait with patience until the return of the young couple.

Adrian and his wife had decided, upon talking the matter over, to wait until the return of the Coolidges from Paris before making their trip to West Malling, meantime they would run down to Winchester to pay poor Lady Douglas a visit and take a look at Winship Towers.

At her earnest request they spent several days with Sir Edgar's widow, who immediately became very much attached to Brownie, while she in turn was pleased with her cousin, and insisted that she should continue to make Winship Towers her home just as long as she desired.

They found the estate in fine condition, and a truly noble inheritance.

Upon their return to London they found numerous cards and invitations from families in high life awaiting them, requesting the pleasure of Mr. Dredmond and lady's presence, etc., etc. One for that evening called them to Manchester House, the residence of the Marquis of Hertford.

"The world is really waking up to the fact that you are actually married, Adrian," Brownie said, mischievously, as she turned over the dainty missives, but her cheeks were glowing with indignation.

The report, without doubt, had spread that Mr. Dredmond's wife was Sir Edgar Douglas' heiress, and she hated this element of caste, which weighed a person according to his or her position in the world, rather than for their intrinsic worth.

"Yes," her husband replied, laughing, "and I wish to show them that I have chosen a *wife worth marrying!* I want you to look especially elegant to-night. Do you need anything to embellish your toilet?"

Brownie laughed merrily at this question, and taking him by the arm, led him to her dressing-room, where, throwing open the door of one of the enormous wardrobes, she commanded him to look and choose for himself what he would have her wear.

Dresses of silk, and satin, and lace; dresses for morning wear, for reception, for dinner, carriage, and evening, in every conceivable hue, variety, and style greeted his eyes.

He smiled as she asked:

"When and where shall I ever have an opportunity to display all these? And you ask me if I need more; don't add to my burdens, please," she concluded, with mock gravity.

"It does seem rather unnecessary, I admit," he replied, running his critical eye over the elegant collection; then he added: "I think I would like to see you wear this to-night," and he designated a delicate peach-colored silk of exceeding richness, trimmed with flounces of elegant lace, headed by graceful wreaths of fuchsias and lilies of the valley.

It was a marvel of taste and art, and very lovely did the young bride look upon emerging from the skillful hands of Milly.

Truly the girl had rare taste and deft fingers.

She had woven Brownie's hair into a coronet to make her slight form look taller and more regal.

Her dress fitted her as if she had been molded into it, while the skirt swept out behind her in a long, graceful train, and just cleared the floor in front sufficient to reveal the tiny white kid boots, with their embroideries of pale pink coral. The corsage was low in the neck, and finished around the shoulders with a delicate vine of the fuchsias and lilies to match the garnishings of the skirt.

She wore the pearls which Lady Dunforth had given her—the lovely necklace, bracelets, the ear-pendants, and the delicate spray for the hair.

Surely no queen could have looked more royally elegant than did this delicate, dainty young wife.

"My darling," exclaimed Adrian, as she swept into the drawing-room, "how beautiful you are, and how proud I am of you!" and he held out his arms as if about to clasp her to him; but drawing suddenly back, he added: "But no; I will not crush a single bud, nor disarrange one of those perfect folds."

"Don't be foolish, dear," Brownie replied, nestling close to him, and clasping her own arms around his neck; "the dress is nothing to me except as it pleases you, and makes me look more lovable in your eyes; besides, I do not wish to look too *new*."

Adrian's marriage—or rather the news of it—had spread like wild-fire among the *elite* of London, and many were the comments and sneers poured upon the unknown American behind her back for having been so successful in "taking him in."

Comparatively little was really known of her, or their marriage, excepting that it had been very sudden and quiet, and *without* the sanctioning presence of Lord and Lady Dunforth.

Contrary to Brownie's surmise, the report of her sudden

accession to wealth and position had not yet become very generally known, and Mrs. Grundy was exceedingly curious to behold this *rara avis* which had created such an unexpected commotion in polite circles.

When at length "Mr. Dredmond and lady" were announced at Manchester House, there was a sudden hush, a stretching of necks—yes, even in that noble crowd, for human nature is the same the world over—and all eyes were turned toward the door as they entered.

Brownie knew that she was the cynosure of all eyes, and although her heart beat rather more quickly than usual, not a muscle of her pure, patrician face quivered as they threaded their way through the crowd.

A delicate bloom was upon her cheek, her lips glowed like scarlet berries, and her eyes gleamed with a brilliancy that made them wondrously beautiful.

It was a moment of triumph to her idolizing husband when she was presented to the Marquis and Marchioness of Hertford, and greeted them with graceful yet perfect self-possession, while the manner of her salutation was remarked by hundreds, and they were dumb with surprise and admiration at both her exceeding beauty and grace.

Could this be a governess—a girl of questionable character and birth—a plebeian American?

Lord and Lady Dunforth were both present, and had been gratified witnesses of the presentation, and both were as proud of Adrian and his peerless bride as if they had been first and foremost in sanctioning the marriage, instead of so bitterly opposing it.

Lady Dunforth's gentle heart went out at once to the lovely wife with a love second only to that which she bore Adrian. She recalled her own long-lost child, for whom she had yearned with a mighty longing during all the long years since her death, and convinced as she was of Brownie's gentle breeding, she

was now fully prepared to give her a daughter's place in her affections.

Lord Dunforth, on the contrary, inwardly cursed himself anew at having been so precipitate in his denunciation of his grandson and his "plebeian bride," if he had only waited until he had seen her he never would have been so rash; and he began to turn over in his mind the best way to get out of a bad fix. He knew Adrian would wish to present his wife to him, and he dreaded to meet her scorn; the sight of her in her proud beauty carried him vividly back to the time when he had so joyfully presented her aunt as his betrothed, and he turned away with almost a groan, as he remembered how that joy had been suddenly turned into mourning.

"Is she not lovely?" whispered her ladyship in his ear, as her eyes wistfully followed their retreating forms.

"Lovely as an angel, but proud as a queen, I ween!" he muttered, wishing that the meeting between himself and that dignified little lady was well over with.

Adrian's fond heart leaped with exultation at the homage which was being paid his darling, and the surprise which he saw expressed in every eye contributed not a little to his amusement.

People crowded around for introductions, and he well knew that all were eagerly watching every word and movement for an opportunity to sneer and criticise; but no one could detect a flaw, in either appearance or manner, wherewith to prove that the future Lady of Dunforth had not been "to the manner born."

But a more signal and unexpected triumph awaited them.

They were busy receiving and responding to congratulations, when all at once a familiar voice fell upon Brownie's ear, giving her a violent inward start.

She pressed Adrian's arm without giving any other sign, and

he, glancing up, saw Lady Randal, Mrs. Coolidge, Sir Charles, and Isabel approaching them.

Another moment the crowd separated, and they stood face to face.

Sir Charles and his party were evidently taken entirely by surprise, for Mrs. Coolidge, as her eyes fell upon the despised governess, became white as the fan of costly feathers that she held in her hand.

Isabel grew crimson with anger and mortification, especially as she had on at that moment the young girl's diamonds, and she looked as if she longed for the earth to open and devour her.

Sir Charles, however, hastened forward, with an expression of real pleasure upon his fine face, and grasping Adrian warmly by the hand, offered his congratulations, and begged to be presented to his bride.

Brownie received him gracefully and cordially, but vouchsafed to Isabel only a haughty lifting of her beautifully arched brows. She bowed distantly to Lady Randal, and, ignoring entirely the presence of Mrs. Coolidge, she turned to speak to some one at her side.

Sir Charles flushed angrily at this marked slight of his betrothed and her mother, and, with a haughty bow, passed on.

"I am sorry on *his* account, darling; but it could not be helped, and you treated them just as you ought," Adrian whispered.

"I see that people have remarked it," Brownie replied, with heightened color; "but I could not have done otherwise had the queen herself been an eye-witness."

"Now I perceive that a still greater trial awaits you," her husband said, as he saw Lord and Lady Dunforth approaching; "but I know you are fully equal to it."

They both knew that many curious eyes were fastened upon them, to see how these greetings would be exchanged.

Many and various had been the reports circulated regarding his lordship's sentiments concerning his grandson's marriage; but if people were expecting any demonstration, they were deeply disappointed.

Lord Dunforth approached and shook his boy heartily by the hand, and then turned, with a very pale but benignant face, to the young bride.

She could not take his hand, but swept him a charming courtesy, with every appearance of marked respect; then, with very bright eyes, and her slender form very erect, she turned to greet her ladyship, and was soon chatting upon the most friendly terms with her.

"By Jove!" muttered Lord Dunforth to himself, "she understands herself perfectly. The most critical could find no fault with her greeting; and yet to me it is very evident that I shall be obliged to hoist a flag of truce before we can come to any terms of peace. I'm glad of it," he added, his eyes resting admiringly upon the bright face; "it just suits me. My own Meta was not more regal."

Turning to Adrian, he said, with a suspicious tremble in his voice:

"I heartily congratulate you, my boy. Shall there be peace between us?"

"Certainly, my dear sir, if——"

"I understand you," he interrupted, "and I find no flaw in her. Indeed, Adrian, I am as proud of your triumph to-night as you can possibly be."

"Thank you. If you had read the letter I wrote you all unpleasantness might have been avoided, for in it I explained that she is a niece of your—of a Miss Douglas whom you used to know," Adrian returned.

"I know all about it, my boy," his lordship said, in a husky voice. "I discovered all the other day when I met your wife at Capel & Armand's."

"Yes, she told me you were there."

"What! did she recognize me?" and the color flew to his face, as he recalled Brownie's entire self-possession, and how she had ignored his presence.

"Oh, yes; you know she was at Castle Dunforth several weeks since, and it is not likely she would forget you so soon, especially as she already knew so much about you."

"True," he returned, with a troubled look, adding: "I shall call upon you immediately, Adrian, and I hope to persuade you to return to us—we are very lonely."

"Thank you; but we will talk further of that another time. We shall be delighted to see you at the Langham, and I have much more to tell you regarding the circumstances of the past three or four weeks," Adrian returned, gravely.

Meanwhile Isabel and her mother were in anything but a comfortable frame of mind.

They had been thunderstruck upon beholding Brownie, in all her glory, leaning upon Adrian's arm.

They had not dreamed of such a thing as her already being his wife, and while they were intensely relieved to find that no evil had befallen her, yet they experienced the direst concern regarding the future for themselves.

There was no enjoyment for them after that uncomfortable encounter, and, pleading fatigue, they persuaded Sir Charles to withdraw almost immediately, while they racked their brains trying to solve the riddle of the young girl's escape from that secret chamber.

They had returned from Paris rather earlier than they had anticipated, their arrangements regarding the trousseau having been more easily effected than they had expected, so, as Sir Charles was anxious to be back at Vallingham Hall to superintend some alterations which he desired completed before his marriage, they had hastened home.

On reaching London they had found cards awaiting them for

the ball at Manchester House, and remained to attend the festivities.

They had seen hardly any one since their arrival, consequently knew nothing of the nine days' wonder which was agitating the minds of the Londoners.

Lady Randal professed to be horrified at the course which Adrian had taken, and hoped his grandfather would disown him forever for the disgrace he had brought upon the family. She believed that he knew all the time where Miss Douglas was that evening when he had so boldly announced his betrothal, and had only told them of the engagement to soften the scandal of the act he was even then contemplating. Of course, not being cognizant of the part the Coolidges had played in the little drama, this was the only construction she would be likely to put upon the matter.

Sir Charles was highly indignant at the treatment which his party had received, while at the same time he was secretly uneasy about the whole affair.

He could not understand it, and the more he pondered upon it the more puzzled he grew, for he felt that there must be something underneath it all which ought to be accounted for and thoroughly sifted.

Yet after Mrs. Dredmond's reception of his betrothed, which to him appeared almost like a public insult, he was too proud and too deeply wounded to seek any explanation from Adrian, between whom and himself until now the firmest friendship had existed.

CHAPTER XL.

BURYING THE HATCHET.

Lord and Lady Dunforth called again at the Langham the next morning, but found they had been forestalled by numerous other callers, whom Brownie was entertaining in the most charming manner.

She received his lordship with proud but respectful dignity, which, while it grieved him, yet it also excited his admiration that she should thus resent the injury he had done her.

One by one the other visitors departed, until at length they were left alone with the young couple.

After a few moments spent in a pleasant chat, Lady Dunforth whispered a few words in Brownie's ear.

She smiled and nodded compliance, then, turning with inimitable tact to her husband, said:

"Adrian, Lady Dunforth is anxious to inspect the wedding wardrobe and gifts; will you attend her while I entertain his lordship? If you need any explanations Milly can make them."

Adrian saw the point of all this, and rising he gave his arm to his grandmother, and conducted her from the room.

Brownie knew that this moment must come, and was grateful to the countess for so delicately opening the way for those explanations which were needful.

She wore an elegant reception dress of a golden brown tint, with pale pink trimmings, and soft ruchings of lace at her throat and wrists, and Lord Dunforth thought she looked, if possible, more beautiful than she had the previous evening.

He was glad to be left alone with her, yet man of the world

though he was, he felt a terrible awkwardness stealing over him, and he scarcely knew how to break the ice. The young wife, however, set him at his ease at once.

"My lord," she said, "are you fond of flowers? Adrian has arranged a very choice collection in my little conservatory; will you come and see them?"

She arose without waiting for him to reply, and conducted him to a small conservatory leading from the farther end of the drawing-room, where there were indeed the most lovely flowers, while above two beautiful golden canaries were singing in their gilded cages.

Here the young wife exerted herself to entertain him, pointing out to him the different varieties of plants, and made herself so charming that his lordship's heart yearned to be at peace with her; but there was a reserve about her, a thus-far-and-no-farther air in all she said, which plainly told him that the first advances must come from him. It was a trying moment for the proud peer, but taking advantage of a pause in the conversation he bent toward her, took one of her little soft hands in his, and asked, in eager, trembling tones:

"Can the child of my Meta's care and love forgive an old man's folly?"

Brownie's lovely face crimsoned instantly, and the tears sprang unbidden to her eyes.

She had not expected any such humble apology from him. She thought he would be stately and dignified, and would yield his haughty spirit only so far as he could do so gracefully; and she had resolved to show him that a Douglas could be as proud as he; so she was wholly unprepared for anything so subdued as this.

"I have wronged you," he went on, studying the beautiful face, "by judging you without knowing you, and I have wronged Adrian in thinking that, with *him*, caste could ever outweigh love. He is a grand and noble boy—all my hopes

were centered in him, and I could not endure the thought that his heart and his sympathy for any one's misfortune should have run away with his judgment. But I should not have been so hasty—I should have allowed him to bring you to us, that we might have been convinced of the worthiness of his choice. And I cannot tell you, dear, how proud and happy, how relieved I am to find his selection a most fitting one after all."

Ah! then he was only satisfied with her now because he had discovered that she was heiress to Sir Edgar Douglas, and a descendant of the one whom he had loved in his youth; not because of her own worthiness to be his wife, and her ability to make him happy. It was the pride of blood after all. Thus she interpreted his words.

She released her hand, and lifting her head proudly, said, with some hauteur:

"Pardon me, my lord, if I cannot agree with you in thinking that I shall make Adrian any better wife for having noble blood in my veins. I have been brought up under the shadow of democratic institutions, and I believe that true worth should in *every* instance be considered before birth or position. My being a *Douglas* does not change in the least degree mp character."

She looked like a little queen as she proudly faced him, and fearlessly advanced her independent principles.

He liked her spirit, and was compelled to acknowledge to himself that, had there not been a drop of aristocratic blood in her veins, he would rather Adrian had her for his wife than half the titled belles whom he knew.

But the spirit was on him to try her still further, and he asked:

"But, my dear, if you should live to see a son grow to man's estate, would you be willing for him to seek out a wife among the mechanics or peasantry?"

It was a hard, a trying question, and Brownie thought a moment before replying. Then she said:

"Sir, I believe that the worldly condition of a person makes no difference with the heart or intellect, only so far as it contributes advantages of education and culture. If my son should choose a wife whose heart was pure and true, whose mind had been cultivated, and whose nature was refined, so that she was his equal morally and intellectually (for otherwise they could never be congenial), I should never dare take the responsibility of destroying the happiness of a life-time, were she titled lady or peasant born."

"What a noble-hearted little woman you are!" his lordship exclaimed, in admiration, and inspired with something of her own enthusiasm.

Then he added, with a little smile of amusement, while there was an expression of earnest entreaty in his eyes:

"My dear, I think if I had another grandson I should never dare judge his bride until I knew her personally. I like and admire you just as you are, independent of your being a Douglas. Now shall we shake hands and bury the hatchet?"

She looked up, and their eyes met.

She regarded him earnestly for a minute.

She saw that he was really grieving over the injustice he had done her, and was sincere in the sentiments he had just expressed, and she hadn't it in her heart to steel herself longer against him.

With a witching smile and gesture, she laid both her hands in his outstretched palm, and said, archly:

"I had made up my mind to forgive you for Adrian's sake, but I begin to think I shall have to for your own, and," she added, in a lower tone, the tears springing to her eyes, "because auntie loved you so well."

His hands closed over hers in a strong, tender clasp, and, bending down, he pressed a light kiss upon her forehead.

"Did she?" he said, eagerly; "tell me about her."

He led her to a seat, and Brownie, never weary of talking of the dear one who was gone, rehearsed all the sad story which Miss Mehetabel had told her on that last day of her life.

When she told him about the note which Miss Capel had undertaken to deliver his lordship became greatly excited.

"Ah, the treacherous girl! I almost suspected it when it was too late, and but for her I should never have known the sorrow and bitterness I have suffered all these weary years. Oh, Meta, Meta," he cried, with almost a sob, "it was too hard when I loved you so! It has been a terrible wound, and one that has never healed. I cannot even hear her name spoken without its ringing forth from memory's chords notes of anguish. I would not wrong the living," he hastened to say, "for I honor my wife as a pure and noble woman, and she has ever been a kind and gentle helpmeet, but that love was the love of a life-time, which nothing could kill. And she died, you say," he continued, wiping the tears which he could not stay, "only last September, true to the last. Oh, fool and blind that I was, not to have crushed my pride and forced my way into her presence! But," and he started fiercely to his feet and began pacing the room, "I will have it out even at this late day with that traitoress, Lady Randal. I will know what was in that note yet, and she shall know that her perfidy is discovered."

"My lord, I have the note," interrupted Brownie, and she told him how she had gained possession of it, thinking it no wrong to take it under the circumstances.

"It was perfectly justifiable, and will you give it to me?" he begged.

"Yes, I will get it for you before you go."

Then he asked her about the mystery of the jewels, and how Isabel Coolidge happened to have them, and she had to repeat all the circumstances regarding them.

"You shall have them again," he cried. "I can prove that every one belongs to you. That girl shall give them up, and I only hope that Sir Charles will have his eyes opened before it is too late."

Brownie smiled as she thought how many had expressed that wish, and just at that moment Adrian appeared with Lady Dunforth.

"Have you two made it up?" the former asked, laughing, as he saw how confidential they had become.

"Yes; and I've promised not to interfere with my next grandson's matrimonial inclinations in any way," Lord Dunforth replied, with a sly glance at Brownie, as he shook the young man's hand.

He laughed, then asked:

"Did she tell you how they made her a prisoner down at West Malling, and of her discoveries there?"

"No."

So Adrian related that circumstance himself, and explained how, when he found her cold and desolate the next morning, with not a friend to whom to flee, and feeling it impossible to return to Lady Ruxley, he had proposed on the spot to take her away in the only way in which he could do so honorably—by making her his wife, and so they had come immediately to London and were married.

"Right, my boy, and I honor you for it. May Heaven forgive me for seeking to destroy your happiness in the way I did," returned his lordship, heartily, while his horror and indignation against Lady Randal for her conduct regarding her younger son was boundless.

Harmony being fully restored, Lord and Lady Dunforth spent the day and dined with the young couple, and parted from them in the evening upon the best of terms, insisting that they must sojourn at least a part of every year at Castle Dunforth.

"You know that it is your home, Adrian—yours and—may

I call you Meta?" his lordship asked, suddenly turning to Brownie, and speaking the name with infinite tenderness.

"Yes, do; I should like it," she replied, with a smile.

"Then, my children, you will come home soon," he added.

"Yes, sir, we will," and Adrian shook his hand heartily.

So the breach was healed, and the gentle Lady of Dunforth, who never dreamed of the wound which had been concealed from her all these years, nor what peculiar reasons her husband had for regarding the young wife with favor and even affection, thanked Heaven that peace was restored, and returned to Dunforth with a light heart, where she took great delight in preparing for the coming of her children.

My lord kept by himself for a day or two. The past had been revived in all its keen bitterness, and he could not brook the presence of others. He mourned the death of his Meta, yet he experienced great comfort in the knowledge that she had loved him, and him alone, until the end.

Ah! how rare are such instances of deathless love.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE IMPENDING STORM.

For a week longer calls and invitations poured in upon the newly-wedded couple, and it seemed almost impossible to tear themselves away from London.

But at the expiration of that time Adrian thought they ought not to delay their visit to Vallingham Hall any longer, lest the marriage of Sir Charles should take place, and they be off upon the Continent before they could secure Brownie's jewels.

Besides, he had it in his power to save his friend from a life-

time of misery, and he felt that he would be doing him a grievous wrong did he not warn him of the precipice upon which he was standing.

Neither did he think it would be right to allow him to go away without acquainting him of the fact that he had a brother living, for of course that circumstance alone would make a great difference in his future prospects, and he ought to know of it before the settlements were completed.

Accordingly, on Monday preceding the wedding, which was to occur upon Wednesday, the 10th of June, they went down to West Malling, intending after their errand was accomplished to make Lady Ruxley their promised visit, and then repair to Dunforth Castle for a while.

Lord Dunforth had stipulated that he was to be one of the party whenever they went to Vallingham Hall, consequently they stopped and took him up on their way.

"You will need me," he had said, "to help prove your property; and since I purchased some of the jewels myself, and have seen them all, I can identify them in case they should attempt to contest your right. Besides, we may as well finish the whole business at once, and I'll call Helen to account for her part in the drama of my life."

Brownie dreaded the encounter more than she could express, and had she not prized the jewels more on account of their sacred associations than for their intrinsic value, she never would have attempted to recover them.

Besides, she disliked to do anything which would appear like revenge; and she was afraid, nay she felt very sure in her own heart, that Sir Charles would decline to go on with the marriage when he should learn of the part Isabel had taken in the matter.

They arrived at Vallingham Hall about four o'clock, and Lady Randal came to the drawing-room, all smiles, to receive them.

She had recently heard who Brownie was, and of the sudden

change in her prospects, so she adopted the role of ignoring all the "scandalous circumstances" of their marriage which had so shocked her, and was exceedingly gracious to them.

It would be very unwise, she reasoned, to have any falling out with the future Lord and Lady of Dunforth.

"How kind of you," she exclaimed, "to come to us; we ought to have called upon you when we were in London, but we were so hurried with preparations for the wedding that we had no time. And really we were tired out with our trip. You received our cards for the ceremony on Wednesday, I suppose?" she concluded.

"Yes, we received them," Adrian replied, then added, "but we called to-day to see Mrs. Coolidge and Miss Isabel upon a little matter of business."

"I presume they will be delighted to see you. The *trousseau* has just arrived, and we were examining it just as you came. It is perfectly elegant, I assure you, Mrs. Dredmond, and I presume Isabel will take you up to see it; I only hope we shall have a fine day, and that everything will pass off well. How very romantic your marriage was, my dear," she ran on, heedless of Lord Dunforth's threatening looks, "we were very much distressed about your sudden disappearance, and I must say, Adrian, you played your part that evening exceedingly well," and she laughed slyly.

"Played my part well! I do not understand you, madam," Adrian returned, astonished at the accusation.

"You do not understand, indeed! when you knew all the time where she was, and took her away the very next day to marry her. Really, it is quite an unparalleled case."

"Lady Randal," the young man said, sternly, as he saw Brownie's delicate face flush painfully at these insinuations, "at any other time I should deem your words an unpardonable insult, for I knew no more than yourself where Miss Douglas was at that time; but if you will have the kindness to notify your

guests that we wish to see them, that matter, as well as some others, will soon be satisfactorily explained."

Lady Randal colored with displeasure at his words, but she rang the bell, and sent the servant, who appeared, to tell Isabel and her mother that there were callers for them. At Adrian's request she did not send their names, as he feared they might refuse to see them.

She saw from both his own and his grandfather's manner that a storm of some kind was impending, and she grew rather nervous trying to solve the puzzle.

The Coolidges soon presented themselves in the drawing-room, and Sir Charles came with them.

He greeted the guests somewhat coolly, for he could not forget the slight his betrothed had received that evening in London at Manchester House.

Isabel and her mother felt a sudden shock run through all their frame when they saw who was present, but the latter at once resolved to carry a high hand and fight the battle out bravely to the end.

Lord Dunforth and Adrian arose and bowed coldly as they entered, while Brownie inclined her head the merest trifle in the world; but Isabel, ignoring her manner, began gushingly, thinking to take their castle by storm:

"Really, Mrs. Dredmond, you have given us all a terrible fright, but I am rejoiced to find that nothing worse than being married has happened to you. I little thought *I* should have to tender *my* congratulations first," she concluded, turning with a simper to Adrian.

"Yes," put in her mother, before any one else could speak, "I suppose we shall be obliged to pardon you for causing us all so much terror, since your strange disappearance has terminated so happily."

Brownie could endure their insolence no longer.

With a haughty mien, which would have become an outraged queen, she faced her enemies.

"We will waive that topic, if you please," she said, icily, "until we have settled a little matter of business. Mrs. Coolidge, I desire to relieve you of a certain casket, with its contents, which belongs to me, and which you have in your possession."

Isabel turned pale, while Sir Charles and Lady Randal listened in amazement.

Mrs. Coolidge, however, was equal to the situation. Turning to her daughter, she said:

"Oh, yes; Isabel, won't you go and get it? Of course she *needs* it now. If we had only known your address," she added, graciously, turning to Brownie, "we might have forwarded them to you."

Isabel arose to do her mother's bidding, and she whispered to her as she did so:

"You must manage some way to get Sir Charles out of the room, and *keep* him out."

Isabel turned to go, and got as far as the door, when she looked back at Adrian and his wife, and said, with a slight blush:

"As long as this is a business call to mamma, may I beg you to excuse Sir Charles and me? I assure you we are very busy at present."

They bowed coldly, and then turning to her lover, she said:

"Sir Charles, may I speak with you privately?"

He arose and followed her from the room with a perplexed brow. He did not exactly like being called from guests in this way.

"What does all this mean?" he demanded, when they were alone in the hall.

"It means that when Miss Douglas went away from us she

left a box containing some valuables with papa for safe keeping," was the glib reply.

She had been expecting some such question, and had the answer all ready.

"But I thought she was dismissed."

"So she was. She did not behave with propriety, and mamma would not keep her longer. Papa did not like it very well, for he was bewitched with her pretty face, and they were good friends, so she left the box with him until she should be settled somewhere else. You know what happened after that, and we have never had an opportunity to return her property (which papa left in our keeping) until now."

All this sounded very reasonable to Sir Charles, but still he was not quite satisfied.

"What did she do that was so very improper while she was with you?" he asked. "I have never heard."

"Really, Charles," Isabel replied, flushing and pouting in a grieved way, "I do not like to enter into particulars quite so minutely; but if you must know, why, you must, I suppose. One day mamma and I were out on a shopping expedition, when we were obliged to return much earlier than we expected to. On entering the library, we found Miss Douglas lying in Wilbur's arms, with apparently as much composure as if she were reclining upon a couch."

"Is that so!" exclaimed Sir Charles, much shocked. "She does not seem like such a person at all."

"Oh, no; and when mamma talked with her about it, she put on that haughty, queenly air which you noticed the other evening in London, and again this morning, and would listen to nothing."

"But did your father uphold her in this?" Sir Charles asked her, gravely.

"Oh, no, indeed; but she had so bewitched Wilbur that he took all the blame upon himself, and told papa something so

that he excused it, and she made him think *she* was the injured one, after all."

Isabel was almost frightened at herself as she coined these base falsehoods; but she felt that the truth must be concealed from him for the next two days at all hazards. If she could only bridge them over until the fatal vows were spoken, and she was once mistress of Vallingham Hall, all would be well.

"I never would have believed her to be guilty of such indiscretions if you had not told me," Sir Charles said, not yet wholly convinced, but greatly disturbed by the account.

"No, you would not, nor any one else, she is so demure and lady-like," Isabel hastened to say, with every appearance of fairness. "But she never met Mr. Dredmond, to my knowledge, more than three or four times in her life; and, to my mind, it does not look just right for her to run away to be married to him upon so short an acquaintance."

"That is so. It does not seem just the thing, I must confess. And I am surprised at Adrian, too. I thought him a man of more depth," Sir Charles assented, gravely. Then, with a fond glance into the face of his betrothed, he asked: "But what did you wish of me? Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, indeed; but you nearly made me forget, with all your catechising," she laughed, and then went on: "I find that my dress is altogether too loose, and I must have a seamstress to fix it immediately; then I find I neglected to get a pair of pearl-colored gloves to match my traveling suit. Would you mind riding over to the village to attend to it?"

She did not need either, but she *must* get rid of him.

"No, indeed; but will it not do as well a couple of hours hence? Our callers in yonder might think me ungracious to go away while they are here."

Isabel's heart sank; she must get him away at once if possible; she knew that Adrian Dredmond would allow no part of their meanness to be concealed, and there would probably be a

hot battle before they were through. But she thought if she could only get her lover away from it all, maybe they could come to some terms with Lady Randal to conceal the affair from him; for she knew she was as anxious as any one for the marriage to come off. But it would not do to let him mistrust how anxious she was, so she replied, hesitatingly:

"It might do if it were not for the dress—that *must* be attended to at once; and then if you do not succeed in matching my dress in gloves, I shall have to send up to town for them, and you know we have no time to spare."

"Would it not do to send a piece of the dress and let Brown do the errand? I really do not like to seem uncourteous, notwithstanding their treatment of us the other evening," he replied.

Isabel flushed angrily at the remembrance.

"No, indeed, I should not dare trust Brown; and then you forget you have not given your instructions concerning the bell, which was to be made at the village florist's, as there were not japonicas enough in the greenhouse here," Isabel said, catching at this device for getting him away. "Besides," she added, "this is only a business call, you know."

He began to notice her anxiety in spite of her forced composure, and with a searching look into her face he replied, as he turned away:

"True, I had almost forgotten about that. I will attend to your commissions at once."

She told him to wait one moment while she procured a piece of silk to match the gloves by; and he stood there with bent head and contracted brow until she returned with it, and then, without a word, he passed out toward the stables.

The guilty girl then sped back again to her room as if on wings to bring the casket, anxious to have everything settled, and those wretched marplots out of the way before his return.

As she re-entered the drawing-room she saw at a glance that

her mother was very much disconcerted about something, and she heard Adrian say, sternly:

"Then, madam, you still assert that you were *very much surprised*, as well as *distressed*, at Miss Douglas' disappearance?"

"Certainly; how could it be otherwise?" she demanded, haughtily, but very pale.

"Were you a man," he returned, with biting scorn in his tones, "I should not thus privately bandy words with you—you should answer publicly for what you have done; and it is time your complicity in this matter be exposed."

"I beg your pardon," she interrupted, "but Isabel has returned with the box for which you came, and as we are extremely busy, you will kindly excuse us from a longer interview."

She arose as if to leave the room, but Adrian advanced a step or two, and said, firmly:

"Not so, madam; you have done my wife altogether too much injury, and covered up your iniquity too long to admit of my keeping silence now. You have sneered and tried my patience beyond endurance to-day with your insinuations concerning a 'clandestine marriage,' and it is but just and right that she should be exonerated in the presence of Lady Randal from all blame for what you, by your cruelty, drove her to."

"Good heavens! Adrian, explain yourself. I am all in a maze! What do you mean by all this talk about complicity, iniquity, and cruelty?" demanded Lady Randal, looking from one to another in perplexity.

Mrs. Coolidge saw that the truth would have to come now, and she sank back pale and trembling into her chair, while Isabel burst into nervous weeping.

Adrian, in the fewest words possible, told the story of the jewels, and her ladyship knew before he had finished that every word he uttered was truth.

She, too, began to grow pale and nervous, as she realized

that his wife was the niece of the woman whom she had so deeply injured, and conscience stung her sharply as these memories of the past were revived.

"Mrs. Dredmond," said Lord Dunforth, who had scarcely spoken yet, "will you please open that casket, and allow me to look at its contents?"

Brownie lifted the lid, for the lock had been forced after she had taken the key, and it was only fastened by the spring, and revealed the glittering treasures it contained.

Lady Randal uttered a cry, and gasped out:

"I might have known it in the first place. I *thought* I had seen them before, especially those corals."

"Ah! you recognize the *corals*, then? Possibly you remember the first and only time this lady's aunt wore them, years and years ago?" said his lordship, with bitter irony, while his own face blanched, and great drops of sweat stood upon his forehead. "Those jewels," he went on, striving for composure, "were given to Miss Mehetabel Douglas, the grand-aunt of Mrs. Dredmond, more than forty years ago. I myself presented those corals, also that tiara, with one or two other pieces. The others were given her in honor of her approaching marriage with myself."

Mrs. Coolidge nearly screamed at this announcement. Yes, she saw it all now; the mystery was all explained—the titled names upon the dancing-card, the faded flowers, and everything which had so puzzled her.

But Brownie, thinking a little more explanation was necessary, lifted the velvet bed, and taking up that dancing-list, passed it to him, and asked him to unlock the secret of it, since it had greatly troubled Mrs. Coolidge and her daughter.

He took it; but his hand shook as with the ague, as he read the names upon it.

"This," he said, turning first to Mrs. Coolidge, then to Lady Randal, with stern brow, "is the order of dances as they oc-

curred upon a certain occasion at the house of your aunt, Lady Ruxley, more than forty years ago. Do you remember, Helen?"

"Yes, I remember," her lips articulated, while her eyes seemed fastened, as if by fascination, upon him.

He referred to the card again, and though his face was ghastly from the pain he was suffering, he went on:

"Do you remember a certain Count de Lussan who was present that evening?"

She bowed her head. She could not have spoken at that moment to save her life, so great was the fear in her heart, while all the events of that fatal night rose up before her with a vividness which turned her sick and faint.

Good heavens! would she *ever* forget that gorgeous room, the brilliant lights, the enchanting music, and the perfume of flowers, which she fancied even now oppressed her?

Would she *ever* forget the dark, handsome, though sinister face of Count de Lussan, with its mocking smile, as he watched that bright, beautiful girl who stood hesitating between love and pride, until her own taunting laugh drove the good angel from her side, and the joy of two lives was crushed out forever?

And why should he, Royal Dunforth, come to her *now*, like an accusing spirit, to recall all these things of the past?

His next question told her something of his purpose.

"Do you know *how it happened* that a man of *his* character was present among respectable people?"

"Yes; he came at my brother's invitation, my lord," she said, lifting her head, and speaking defiantly.

"True; but at *your* instigation, and to serve a vile purpose of your own. It was through *your* maneuvering that he was introduced to Miss Douglas, and it was *your* taunts which spurred her on to disgrace herself and dance with him, in spite of her better judgment and my persuasions. I mistrusted something of it when it was too late, and you, by that *last* vile

act, which I have only recently discovered, had separated us forever."

"And pray what terrible deed have you discovered at this late day?" her ladyship demanded, sarcastically, although she was colorless as a piece of marble, and her lips twitched nervously.

"This! Do you remember ever seeing it before?"

He took from his pocket a folded paper, yellow and creased with age, and advancing, gave it into her hands.

Lady Randal, never for a moment dreaming what it was, took it with a sneer, for she was growing bitterly angry at his accusations, opened it, and read it.

For an instant she sat like one stunned, but she was livid even to her lips, and a trembling seized her which shook her like a reed.

"Where did you get this?" she whispered, hoarsely, after a moment.

"Accident threw it into my hands—how, it does not matter now; but it reveals all your vile plot to separate Meta and me, in which you succeeded only too well."

"But how do you know that *I* had anything to do with this note? I do not see that you have proved what you assert at all," she said, bridling.

"She gave that note to her servant to bring to me, *you* met her on the stairs, said you would deliver it, and then came and told me that Meta refused to see me then or at any other time; have I proved my point now?" he asked, sternly.

She saw all was discovered, and made no reply, and he went on:

"Mrs. Dredmond, as you know already, is *my* Meta's grandniece. At her aunt's death she found herself very unexpectedly reduced to the necessity of earning her own living. She found a place as governess in Mrs. Coolidge's family, and came abroad with them. One day when she was out, she," pointing to Isabel, who sat pale and cowering, "entered her room, where

she discovered this casket of jewels. She took them to her mother, and they both came to the conclusion that a *poor governess* had no business with such valuables—that she must have stolen them! They accused her of it upon her return, and refused to give up the jewels until she could *prove* them to be hers."

"Why didn't she demand them, and take the law to enforce her rights then?" demanded Lady Randal, sharply. "It does not sound like a very probable story to me. How do you *know* she is Meta Douglas' niece? I believe you've been taken in yourself."

She was determined not to believe anything against her guests if she could help it. Matters had gone so far now, that she could not have the match between Sir Charles and Isabel broken off; the scandal of it would be unbearable, to say nothing of the loss of Isabel's fortune, which she believed to be enormous. They had been expecting Mr. Coolidge for a week, and thought surely he would be there to-day, when the settlements were to be arranged, and there must be no trouble now.

"We have indisputable proof, Lady Randal; and as for Miss Douglas taking the law to enforce her rights, she fully intended to do so when she left Mrs. Coolidge's house; but you remember the accident which occurred, and which threw her into your family; and then before she was fully recovered Lady Ruxley brought her down here.

"The day when she so strangely disappeared she met Miss Coolidge in the upper corridor, as she was going out for her walk. She again demanded her property, and was again refused. Upon returning to the Hall, in passing Miss Isabel's room, she saw the casket upon the table, she entered and took it, and was about leaving the room when Mrs. Coolidge confronted her, demanding that she put down the casket. She refused, when the woman locked the door, putting the key in

her pocket, saying she could not leave the place until she relinquished it."

"Really, Lady Randal," interrupted Mrs. Coolidge, rising, apparently in great wrath, "I cannot remain to endure further insult. It seems to me we have listened long enough to this harangue, as we have other matters of more importance on hand just now which demand our attention."

"Please be seated," she returned, "we will hear this whole story now. I must confess it does not sound very plausible to me, but we will hear their side, and then your own."

She little thought how the "whole story" would affect her!

"Go on," she added, to Lord Dunforth; but Adrian now took up the story.

"Miss Douglas utterly refused to give up her property again, and the two had a stormy scene, until Mrs. Coolidge finally professed to be willing to temporize with her, and pretending to take her into her own room, enticed her into a secret chamber which she had discovered——"

"What! the treasure chamber!" ejaculated Lady Randal, excitedly, and losing all her color again.

"I do not know what the place is called," Adrian replied, "but she locked her within it, and kept her there without food or light, or even a chair to sit upon until midnight, when she and her daughter sought her again, and, by stratagem and force combined, succeeded in getting possession of the jewels again. Then they brought her food and bedding, telling her she was to remain there until after the wedding, since they could not run the risk of her making them trouble and interfering with their prospects."

"'Tis false!" shrieked Isabel, nearly beside herself.

"Be quiet, my daughter," said Mrs. Coolidge, soothingly. Then turning to Lady Randal, she asked: "Can you believe such a tissue of falsehoods? No one has seen the girl from the time she parted with my children in the park that day until

after her marriage. It is a preposterous story, and only fabricated to save the parties most interested from the scandal usually attending a clandestine marriage. Besides, what is all this talk about a secret chamber?" she concluded, scornfully.

Lady Randal looked at her in a dazed kind of a way, while a terrible fear was tugging at her heart.

"But how could she know there is a secret chamber unless she had seen it?—and it leads from Isabel's room. Go on, Adrian, I must hear all now," she said, in a low, concentrated tone.

He gave her a look of compassion, and resumed:

"Miss Douglas arranged her bed, striving to make the best of her situation, and, being very weary, soon fell into a sound slumber. She was not conscious of how long she had slept, but she was suddenly awakened by a feeling that some one was in her room, and upon opening her eyes saw the strangest being she ever beheld kneeling by her side."

"Oh, heavens!" breathed Lady Randal, sinking back in her chair, and covering her face with her trembling hands.

CHAPTER XLII.

"WHERE IS MY BROTHER?"

Isabel and her mother now forgot some of their own fear when they saw Lady Randal so unnerved.

It had been a matter of great mystery to them how their prisoner escaped, and it seemed that it was about to be explained; and Mrs. Coolidge, with her ready wit, began to think that the skeleton of the house was to be revealed also.

"This person," Adrian resumed, "proved to be a young man by the name of——"

"Oh, spare me!—in mercy, spare me, Adrian!" cried the guilty woman, springing toward him, with outstretched hands and agonized face.

"Spare you! Have you spared your own flesh and blood?" demanded Adrian, sternly. "Have you ever felt an atom of mercy for your own son, whom, for over twenty years, you have doomed to almost solitary confinement, away from the sunlight and fresh air, depriving him of the simplest rights which a human being craves—liberty and his own place in the world? Oh, heartless mother that you are! it is but just and right that the world should know that Herbert Randal, your third son, because of a deformity with which God saw fit to inflict him, has been loathed by the woman who bore him, and that, to further the interests of your favorite child, you have kept him secreted for years, hoping that, in his feeble state, every year would be his last, and your guilty course never become known. But God is merciful, and the time for restitution is at hand; and, be it known to you, it was through him Miss Douglas was released from her confinement."

He then went on and explained at length how it had transpired; how he had found Brownie, cold and trembling, and exhausted from excitement and terror, in the grove in the rear of the Hall, and had persuaded her to give him the right to protect her at once.

He explained their journey to London, in company with Nurse Clum and Milly, and concluded by saying:

"We intended returning hither immediately, but unforeseen circumstances prevented; and when at length I was enabled to come, you were gone to the Continent. We should not have intruded upon you to-day had we not deemed it best to secure this casket before Sir Charles and his wife should leave again."

"Indeed I intended expressing the jewels to her just as soon

as the wedding was over," sobbed Isabel, who was now completely unnerved, and believed all was over for her.

"Cease your silly crying, and wipe your tears!" commanded her mother, in a whisper. "Don't you see," she went on, hurriedly, "that we have the game all in our own hands now! It is not a pleasant pickle to be in, I admit, but Lady Randal's situation is much worse. Sir Charles knows nothing of all this, thanks to our getting him out of the room, and if *we* will consent to overlook his *mother's* very questionable conduct, of course she will be glad to keep dark about *our* affairs, and we will have the wedding yet, though I shall not envy you afterward if Sir Charles ever finds this out."

During Adrian's recital Lady Randal sat cowering in her chair, in a terror-stricken condition.

That all her dark plottings and her wickedness, which she believed were so successfully concealed, should thus be brought to light, and at the very time, too, when she was most anxious that no shadow should touch her fair fame, was a most crushing blow.

When the young man concluded there was an awkward silence for a few moments, except for Mrs. Coolidge's whispering to Isabel, and then, lifting her haggard face, Lady Randal asked:

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"What are we going to do about it, madam!" exclaimed Lord Dunforth, in astonished tones. "*I* should ask, what are *you* going to do about it? Of course we all expect to see justice done at once."

"You shall!" she said, eagerly; adding: "Yes, it is all true. We were traveling that summer when he was born, we were stopping just at the time in a picturesque village in Savoy, and my husband was called away to Paris on business. He was absent a fortnight, during which time Herbert was born. I can never tell you," she went on, shuddering, "what a frightful ob-

ject he was. His present appearance is nothing to what he was as a baby, and I prayed the nurse to take him from my sight, and never let me look upon him again. My husband was detained long beyond the time he had anticipated, so that at the end of three weeks I was well and strong again. Then it came to me that, as he had not been with me, and fully believing that the child could not live long anyway—both the doctor and the nurse affirmed it—I deemed it would be better to keep all knowledge of its existence from him. I could not travel with it in its feeble state, and it would be exceedingly painful to do so if I could, so I made arrangements with the nurse to care for it as long as it should live, and never let any one know whose child it was.

"I wrote my husband that my child had been born, telling him it was better it should die, since such a poor little cripple could not live long at the most, and said I would join him in Paris in a few days, as it was intolerable for me to remain longer where I had suffered such a severe disappointment. When I met him he seemed grieved and sorrowful, yet he never questioned me further, and so I kept my secret until his death. After that I concluded to bring the child here, since the nurse wrote me that he was getting unmanageable, and so I fitted up those secret chambers as comfortable as I could, and have kept him there. God knows that I could not willfully have wronged the child so, but after that first concealment it seemed impossible to confess his existence, and so it has gone on until now. He has always been feeble, and I have thought, from year to year, that he could not live, and that if he did not, it would be better if his existence was never known."

"Have you never considered the sufferings and feelings of the poor boy?" demanded his lordship, wrathfully.

She shrunk as if he had struck her.

"Oh, yes," she moaned; "but I saw no way out of it without bringing disgrace upon Charles and all of us."

"Do you think *he* would uphold you in such a deed?"

"No, no! Oh, how you torture me! But," she said, looking up pitifully, "you will not take any public action against me?"

"Public action!" he repeated, contemptuously. "Could any public action restore those twenty years of his lost life to the poor boy? No; but I want justice now."

"He shall have it. I will strive as far as I can to repair the injury I have done him, just as soon as we are through with the wedding—that is, if Isabel is willing to go on with it after this," she said, regarding the young girl somewhat doubtfully.

Mrs. Coolidge's heart leaped at this; it was just the condition of all others she most desired Lady Randal to be in. Rising, she went over to her side, and holding out her hand, said, with an appearance of great magnanimity:

"I regret exceedingly that anything so very dreadful should have occurred, but we have all done wrong. I am ready to acknowledge my share regarding Mrs. Dredmond. Shall we then overlook each other's faults, and still allow our children, who are not to blame, to be happy?"

The guilty mother grasped her hand eagerly.

"And you will not betray me to Charles just yet?" she gasped.

"Certainly not; you must confide in him yourself when you think proper. I think myself it would be wiser not to tell him until after his return from his tour, for it might destroy all his pleasure. When once he is settled at home again, then all these things can be explained," she said, suavely.

Nothing could exceed the expression of scorn visible upon the faces of their three noble guests at this piece of contemplated subterfuge.

Lord Dunforth, towering aloft in his indignation, advanced, and stood before the two women.

"No, madam," he said, firmly; "you may hide what else

you choose from him, but Sir Charles must be acquainted this day—nay, this hour—with the fact that he has a brother."

The attention of all was at this moment attracted by a slight noise at the other end of the drawing-room.

Another instant and they were thunder-struck to behold Sir Charles himself staggering toward them like a drunken man. His face was haggard and drawn, as if he had but just recovered from a convulsion; even his lips were white and rigid, while his forehead shone with the clammy moisture which a fierce agony had drawn forth.

Isabel sprang forward, with a sharp cry of pain, but he warded her off by a motion of his hand.

His mother shrieked.

"Oh, Charles, have you heard?" and Mrs. Coolidge shrank back appalled at this unexpected turn of affairs.

"Yes," he said, in a hollow voice, and casting a look of withering contempt upon Isabel. "I see now why you were so anxious to get rid of me. I mistrusted something was not right, and after sending Brown to the village to execute your commission, I came in by the lawn window, as it was nearer. I entered just as Mrs. Dredmond opened the casket of jewels and instantly a great deal was explained to me. I was so overcome by the discovery that I dropped upon the divan behind the curtains, where I have remained, a silent witness of all that has occurred in this room."

Adrian, deepest sympathy in his face, went to him, and taking his hand, said, with emotion:

"Believe me, Charles, God knows I would have saved you from this if I could. You do not deserve it."

He groaned aloud at these words of sympathy; then wringing his hand he dropped it, and advancing to his mother, demanded, in cold, hard tones:

"Madam, *where is my brother?*"

"Your brother—oh, my boy!" she began, between her sobs.

"Yes, my brother. I demand him at your hands, and may God forgive you for your iniquity—I am afraid I never can."

The shriek which burst from her died suddenly upon her lips, and the look of anguish in her eyes froze into one of terror, as the drawing-room door slowly swung back, revealing a strange picture within its frame—the little, bent form of Lady Ruxley, her old and withered face full of a stern resolve, one hand resting upon her cane, the other upon the arm of Herbert Randal!

CHAPTER XLIII.

WOULD HE FORGIVE HER?

Lady Ruxley had arranged with one of the servants that she was to be notified whenever Mr. Dredmond and his wife should come. Consequently she had received the intelligence of their arrival almost immediately.

She knew that Adrian would make a clean breast of everything, and she reasoned that it would be the best time now for Herbert to be introduced to his brother and their friends, and have his future position in the family established at once.

She had kept the young man with her until Lady Randal returned from Paris, when he insisted upon returning to his old quarters until his existence should be made known to his brother; and this meeting with Sir Charles had caused him many sleepless nights and much anxious thought. He had hesited now with an undefinable dread at his heart about making his appearance, but, after a second thought, he had yielded to Lady Ruxley's command, feeling that it would be better for all parties to have the matter settled for all time.

She had learned to love the quiet, gentle young man during

the short time he had been with her; he was so attentive and entertaining that he made her forget her bodily ailments, while he shamed her by his own patience and submission into repressing her fretfulness and grumbling.

She seemed to have grown younger since she had had this new object in life to interest her, and she now entered the room in a brisk, decided manner, her wrinkled face all alive, and her keen eyes on the alert to watch and read every movement and expression.

Herbert was very pale, but quiet, and there was a certain dignity and decision in his manner which plainly told that he was resolved henceforth to assert his rights.

Lady Randal started up wildly as they entered.

"How came you here—what right have you to come here?" she demanded, almost fiercely.

"The right of a free man, mother," was his quick but firm reply.

"Ha!" exclaimed Lady Ruxley, bitterly. "I suppose you did not fill up the measure of your wickedness in your youth, Helen, and so you must needs hide this innocent child, denying him all love and care, and his rightful place in his own home."

"Spare me now, aunt—I suffer enough," groaned the unhappy woman, who had sunk back trembling again at her son's reply.

"Spare you! Whom have *you* ever spared, I should like to know, if they happened to obstruct your path? Look back over your past life, think of your victims, and repent before it is too late. I only regret that I did not know of this wrong earlier; it should have been righted long ago, I promise you. Charles," and she turned suddenly upon him, searching his face eagerly with her keen gray eyes, "this is your brother!"

He had always been her ideal of manliness and excellence;

she deemed him noble, self-sacrificing, chivalrous, but she knew that this was a test which would try his very soul.

Would he be equal to it, and still be the noble man she thought him?

She dreaded yet longed for the issue, while every one in that room stood silent, almost breathless, awaiting the meeting of the brothers.

The moment the door had opened, and his eyes had fallen upon his crippled brother, Sir Charles had stood as one transfixed.

The hideous deformity had been the first thing to attract his attention, of course. That misplaced head, the misshapen shoulders, the withered, helpless hand, the twisted leg and foot had struck a terrible feeling to his heart. Then his eyes had sought the sad, pale face with an eager, searching gaze, as if seeking to know something of the soul within that distorted body.

At once he marked the grandly-shaped head, with its broad, square forehead, which looked almost majestic beneath the crown of snowy hair. He marked the delicate, refined features, the deep, true, blue eyes, with their dark, sweeping lashes, the sensitive, expressive mouth, and the firm, decided chin.

It was a noble, attractive face, and as he looked, the shock of repulsion which he had at first experienced passed, and in its place came a tender pity and affection born of sympathy and the knowledge that this was his kin—his brother.

At Lady Ruxley's words he went eagerly toward him, and clasping his hand in a strong, protecting clasp, exclaimed:

"My brother! How glad I am for the gift, even though it comes so late. Shall we begin to love each other *now*, Herbert?"

The two men—one so strong, handsome, and self-reliant in his glorious manhood, the other so weak and helpless in his de-

formity—gazed into each other's eyes with a look which seemed to read their very souls, and the tears started unbidden to each.

Though outwardly so different in appearance, their natures were alike—grand and pure.

"God bless you, my brother!" murmured Herbert Randal, with quivering lips, while a deep joy, such as he had never known in all his life before, thrilled him through and through.

He had not been prepared for any such reception as this. From his aunt's description of his brother, he had hoped to be kindly received, and his presence perhaps tolerated; but this hearty gathering into the arms of his affection moved him deeply.

Isabel Coolidge, looking on and beholding this scene, saw herself in a new light. She was bowed with shame and humiliation at the thought of her own selfish, wasted life, while she realized the grandness of Sir Charles' nature as she had never done before, and knew she was unfit to mate with him.

She knew, also, although he had spoken no word to that effect, that that hour would probably separate them forever.

"Charles! Charles! my dear boy!" cried Lady Ruxley, in trembling tones, while tears rained over her wrinkled face, "I hoped you would stand this test of character nobly. I have always been proud of you, but God knows that I love you at this moment with a deeper love than ever before."

"Dear aunt, surely you did not expect I should reject my brother?" he said, in surprise, then added, as he saw how affected she was: "Come, let me take you to a seat."

He led her to a comfortable chair, and then, while Lord Dunforth and his party exchanged greetings with his brother, he went and stood once more before his mother.

He was very grave and sorrowful, and the brightness and animation which had lighted up his face for a few moments had given place to a painful pallor again.

"Mother," he began, in low but firm tones, "I will not up-

braid you for this cruel wrong, for I know that your own conscience will reprove you more sharply than I have the heart to do; but I wish it to be distinctly understood that Herbert and I are henceforth to live upon terms of equality. Whatever I have of this world's goods that he *can* share, he *shall* share, and I bespeak for him in the future your tenderest love and care, and the respect and consideration of the entire household."

Lady Randal could only reply by cries and sobs; she was utterly unnerved. The plottings of a lifetime had been brought to naught in an hour.

He then turned his attention to Mrs. Coolidge, who was sitting, sullen and crest-fallen, near by.

"Madam," he said, haughtily, "the carriage will be at your disposal at any hour you may see fit to name. I will see," and a spasm of pain crossed his face, "that our friends are all notified that their presence here on Wednesday will not be acceptable, since, after the cruelties and deceptions brought to light to-day, I must decline the honor of your daughter's hand and an alliance with your family.

"And, oh, Isabel!" he said, suddenly facing the nearly fainting girl, and almost unnerved himself, "may God forgive you for your part in this matter. I deemed you so good and true that I had built my strongest hopes upon spending a happy and useful life with you. The vail has been rudely torn from my eyes, but it is better now than later."

She cowered beneath his words as if every one had been a cruel blow struck upon her naked heart.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me!" she cried, with an agonized look; "the loss of your love and respect is more than I can bear."

"I feel less of anger than of sorrow," he returned; "but there are others whose forgiveness you should seek also," and he glanced at Mrs. Dredmond.

She looked up at him, eagerly searching his sad face.

Would he forgive her, and open his arms to her again, if she should be repentant and humble?

But no; there was no answering eagerness in his eye, and she saw that the discovery of her falsehood and cruelty had parted them hopelessly, and she could not be his wife; her falsehood, cruelty, and deceit had built an impassable barrier between them, and, filled with bitter agony, she felt at that moment as if she would rather have had her tongue torn out by the roots than humble herself to Adrian Dredmond's wife.

Sir Charles saw her face harden and darken with passion, and, while he sighed over the wickedness of her heart, he yet wondered how he ever could have been so blinded and deceived by her.

"Shall I take you to Mrs. Dredmond?" he pleaded, longing for her own sake to have her acknowledge her wrong-doing, and hating to lose all respect for her.

"No, I thank you, Sir Charles. Do you think, after this day's doing, that I could ever bow down to *her?*" she sneered, trying to brave it out, though her face looked drawn and pinched from the torture she was suffering.

He half turned from her in disgust, and saw that Brownie herself was approaching them.

She held out her hand to him, and he clasped it warmly—every spark of the resentment which he had cherished since they met in London gone from his heart.

She then turned to Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel, saying, in sweet, low tones:

"I wish to tell you before we go, that I harbor no unkind feelings toward either of you. I sincerely regret that our visit to-day should have accasioned you so much pain, and I wish you to feel that it was no spirit of revenge which prompted it. I thought perhaps it might be a comfort to you to know before we part forever," she went on, the tears starting to her beautiful eyes, "that I wish you well."

"Yes. I suppose, now you're at the top of the heap, you think you have a right to crow over us," snapped Mrs. Coolidge, coarsely.

Sir Charles' face flushed an angry red at this insult, and he made a motion of disgust, inwardly giving thanks that his eyes had been opened before it was too late, although so rudely.

The delicate color in Brownie's cheek deepened a trifle, but she answered, kindly:

"I am sorry you think that I have the least feeling of triumph, for I have not, and I believe there will come a time in the future when you will both feel differently toward me. Now I would like to tell you something, which I once refused to do. Those initials, E. H., which you discovered marked upon so many articles in my room, stand for Elinor Hungerford, which was my mother's maiden name."

"Strange that we did not think of that," ejaculated Isabel, in astonishment. "But it seemed out of place to find such elegant things in *your* possession."

"I know," Brownie said, gently, with a compassionate look in her face, and then addressing Mrs. Coolidge again, she said: "And now, if you will not consider me presuming, I wish to ask a little favor of you."

Sir Charles listened in amazement.

This injured, insulted girl, forgetting all past abuse and suffering, and giving them the comfort of granting her a favor!

Surely this was that "charity which suffereth long, and is kind; which vaunteth not itself, seeketh not her own, and is not easily provoked."

Even Mrs. Coolidge herself could not understand this, for, looking up astonished, she ejaculated:

"*You* ask a favor of me, after——"

"Yes, please," interrupted the young wife, hastily. "I wish to see Viola and Alma just for a few moments, to bid them good-by and give them a little token of my love, if you do not

object. I probably shall not have another opportunity of seeing them."

The tears sprang to Brownie's eyes as she said this. She had grown to love the warm-hearted, impulsive girls very dearly during the short time she had been with them.

Mrs. Coolidge did not reply for a moment. She was looking very sober, and seemed almost at a loss how to receive this request.

"Shall I ring for them to be sent here?" asked Sir Charles, coming forward.

"If you please, unless Mrs. Coolidge objects," answered Brownie, waiting for her assent.

"I do not object," she said, briefly, and Sir Charles sent the message.

The girls were delighted, and clung to their old governess in a way to show that she had won their hearts completely; and when she quietly slipped a lovely diamond ring upon the hand of each, their joy was a pleasure to behold.

"My dears," said Brownie, almost weeping as she thought she might never see them again, "I know you will not forget me—that you will remember me whenever you look upon this ring, but I want to ask you to remember something else also."

"What is it, Miss Douglas—I mean Mrs. Dredmond? We will do anything in the world that you ask," they cried.

"Do you remember what I used to tell you about beautiful lives?" she asked, fondly.

"Oh, yes," said gay Alma, becoming suddenly grave. "You said if we would always keep our hearts pure, our lives would be beautiful."

"I think *your* heart must be very pure, for you are very beautiful, and everybody seems to love you," said Viola, with a look of earnest affection.

"My dear, we all make mistakes, and I am not above reproach; but whenever you look at these stones, which are so

and clear, let them teach you purity. We may never meet each other here again, but when we meet in the great future, I pray I may find you unspotted from the world," Brownie replied, with deep emotion.

She then kissed them tenderly, and they left the room, weeping, while Sir Charles turned away to hide his own tears, and marveled at the beautiful spirit which his cousin's wife displayed.

A half-hour later, Lord Dunforth, Adrian, and his wife left Vallingham Hall with Lady Ruxley, who insisted that they should spend the day and dine with her.

Lady Randal went to her own room and to bed, too ill and heart-broken to sit up. And for the first time in her life the proud Helen Capel was humbled in the dust.

Surely Miss Mehetabel Douglas was avenged of her wrongs at last!

As Mrs. Coolidge and Isabel left the drawing-room to seek their own, Sir Charles said to the former:

"At what hour shall I order the carriage for you, madam?"

"Really you are extremely hospitable, it seems to me. You appear to be very anxious to get rid of us," she retorted, sharply.

"Madam, I think it will be the kindest arrangement for all of us for you to go as soon as possible," he replied, sadly, but firmly.

At four o'clock that afternoon they were all *en route* for London, where they purposed remaining until Mr. Coolidge should return from America, when they hoped to leave for the Continent and join Wilbur on his travels. But he did not return to them!

Instead, they shortly received a telegram bidding them come home immediately, as he had found his affairs in such a confused state upon reaching New York that a failure seemed inevitable.

Accordingly, the first of July found them a sadder but wiser family, once more domiciled in their own home in New York City.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ASPASIA COOLIDGE.

Six months later we find a cheerful group gathered in the breakfast-room of Lord Dunforth's house in London.

Brownie is conspicuous among them, and is her own bright, sweet self, seeming more like the happy girl she was on that fifth day of September when Adrian first beheld her in the Art Gallery at Philadelphia, than when we last saw her. Every day she is twining herself closer and closer about the hearts of Lord and Lady Dunforth, who are continually sounding her praises, and think there never was such a wife as Adrian has; while the look of deepening tenderness in the fond husband's eyes whenever they rest upon her, tells of a wealth of love found only in the truest and purest hearts.

They are at breakfast. Brownie has taken the head of the table lately, as Lady Dunforth says she is getting too old to have the responsibility of it, but in reality she loves to sit and watch the lovely face beaming over the silver urns, and the dainty little hands as they flutter like white doves about the rich and glittering service.

And truly the beautiful young wife, although she makes a lovely picture, presides with a gentle dignity all her own. Lord Dunforth has also resigned his place to Adrian, and he and his wife now sit side by side.

He seems to grow more tender of his gentle companion of late, as if he experienced a sort of remorse for the secret barrier which has stood between them all these long years, and thus their lives are being filled with a blessed content, as, with their faces turned toward the setting sun, they calmly await the evening rest.

They have several guests this morning at their table, and one has a very familiar, as well as a decidedly American appearance. It is Mr. Conrad, who has lately arrived in England to return a portion of that property which was intrusted to his care so many years ago.

The other guests are his wife, and ward—Miss Emily Elliott.

Brownie was delighted to receive a visit from them—it seemed almost to link her to the old life once more, for she still had a tender regard for her native land, although she never expected to make it her home again.

She exerted her utmost powers to give them pleasure, and to make the old lawyer forget the one mistake of his life; and she has so far succeeded that he seems like the genial friend of former days, and is indeed almost gay at times.

Adrian had been giving him a dramatic account of his so-called runaway marriage, and they had just concluded a hearty laugh at his expense, when the butler entered with the mail-bag.

"Now for the letters!" said the young man, and he unlocked the bag and began distributing them.

"Aha!" he said, with a mischievous glance across the table, as he took up a heavy missive directed, in a round, bold hand, to his wife. "May I inquire, madam, what gentleman correspondent you have in America?"

"When you get through inspecting the envelope, *I* will inspect the contents, and then, *perhaps*, I'll tell you," replied Brownie, saucily.

"You see, Mr. Conrad," said Adrian, turning to the lawyer with mock seriousness, "that although my wife is getting quite

English in some respects, yet the American independence will crop out occasionally. I despair of ever eradicating that!" he added, with a fond look at the bright face bent so earnestly over the closely-written pages she had unfolded.

Suddenly she looked up, with a little exclamation of delight and surprise.

"Oh, Adrian!" she said, "I have *such* good news for you! Aspasia is going to be married—and to whom do you think?"

"Get Mr. Conrad to guess—he knows more concerning your acquaintances than I," Adrian replied.

"But it is no one whom Mr. Conrad knows at all, and you are well acquainted with him. Besides, he is a New Yorker."

"I am sure I know of no one in New York who is marriageable, unless it be——"

"Well, whom?" Brownie asked, with shining eyes, as he hesitated.

"Wilbur Coolidge," he replied, with a peculiar expression.

"And why not?" she demanded, mischievously; and he laughed outright.

He had always been a trifle sensitive over that little episode in her life. He could not bear the thought that another should even have presumed to love her.

"Let me read you what she says," Brownie went on. "Mr. Conrad knows all about her, and of course you are all interested in my friends, and then Aspasia was so kind when auntie died." The sweet voice always softened tenderly when speaking of auntie. "She begins her news by saying," she continued, referring to the letter:

"'And now, darling, I have some wonderful things to tell you. In the first place, I have abandoned, as I promised you, my trains (except for evening wear), and I trust I have lengthened my charities, and received much personal benefit thereby. I thought I would try short dresses before the Paris Exposition, and get a little accustomed to them, for another such experi-

ence as I went through with, the fifth of one September would finish me entirely. Speaking of the Paris Exposition brings me to another important point. I am making extensive preparations for a European tour, and, if nothing happens, I intend to run over to England and take a look at my Brownie before I return. Now, the cream of my letter lies in the fact that my contemplated tour is to be prefaced by a brief ceremony, which will change Aspasia Huntington to Aspasia Coolidge! Yes, dear, I am going to marry Wilbur Coolidge. He has told me all about his liking for you, and I could not blame the dear boy in the least; for I know if I had been a man I should have wanted to marry you myself. I met Mr. Coolidge while in New York some five months ago, and was at once attracted toward him on account of his manly independence. His father has met with business reverses, which have reduced the family from their former magnificence to almost a state of poverty. Wilbur has proved himself a man in the emergency, putting his shoulder to the wheel, devoting himself to his profession—that of the law—and has done much toward the support of his mother and sisters; consequently, I am very proud of him.

"'Now, I want to tell you a little about Isabel and the rest of the family, but particularly about her, for I know all that you have suffered from her unkindness in the past, although you have never written me a word about it.

"'Mrs. Coolidge is a confirmed invalid, entirely broken down by disappointment and their reduced circumstances; but Isabel, instead of being the weak-minded, vain, and selfish being every one thought her to be, has, like Wilbur, risen nobly above their calamities, takes the whole charge of the household affairs and of her mother, with whom she is as patient as an angel. But she is the saddest creature I ever saw, and I believe the girl's heart is really broken, for her brother tells me she did truly love and esteem Sir Charles Randal, notwithstanding

her inordinate desire to obtain a high position in the world. She never speaks of herself or her sorrow, but devotes herself to others. Whatever her past errors may have been, she is atoning nobly for them, and I believe will come out of this furnace a pure, good woman."

"'The other girls, Viola and Alma, are charming, and they can never say enough in praise of Lady Dredmond, as they persist in calling you. They told me about your gift of the rings, and I think they are really striving for that purity of character which you recommended.

"'Now, dearest, you may expect to see me about the first of February, and don't I long to clasp you once again in my arms, my Brownie, for, dear, it is to you I feel I owe the higher and better views which I now have of life.

"'Ever your loving friend,

"'ASPASIA HUNTINGTON.'"

This letter was like a gleam of the brightest sunshine to Brownie. She longed to see the friend of her youth, and she was delighted to know that she was to marry Wilbur Coolidge. She knew she would make him a good wife, and she felt that he was worthy of her; she had always respected him for his manliness and good principles, notwithstanding he was sometimes led into error by the influence of his mother and sister.

She had not seen him since they parted that day when she left his father's house in London in such trouble; but she was sincerely glad that there was a prospect of meeting him again, and she rejoiced that he was to be made happy by the love of a good, true woman.

Her tears fell as she thought of Viola and Alma striving so earnestly to reach her standard of excellence, while her deepest sympathies were stirred for the misguided Isabel, who was being tried in such a fiery furnace and bade fair to come forth purified.

"I shall show this letter to Sir Charles," she said, when she

was alone with Adrian, and had read it a second time. "But what have you there?" she added, as she saw him examining another letter with a puzzled expression.

"I am trying to make out whether this epistle is directed to you or to me. The Mr. or Mrs., whichever it is, is very indistinct," he replied.

"I think it must be for me," Brownie said, smiling. "It is a lady's hand, and the Mrs. looks as if a tear had dropped upon it."

"At all events, you may have the privilege of opening it," said Adrian, giving it to her.

She did so, and all doubt was removed as she read:

"My Dear Mrs. Dredmond:—If you will allow me to address you thus, after all the trying events of the past. Since misfortune has come upon us, and I now occupy an humbler position than even you did when you were with us, my eyes have been opened, and I now see my wickedness in all its enormity. I cannot rest until I tell you how sincerely I repent of my unkindness to you, and ask you to forgive me if you can. Your lovely spirit and example on that last dreadful day at Vallingham Hall shamed while it maddened me, but the memory of it has since conquered me. I grieve continually over my treatment of you, and the sinfulness which has ruined my own life and wronged others; yet I can truthfully say that I rejoice that the right triumphed, and that you are now happy.

"I do wrong, perhaps, to say that my life is ruined, for although much of it has been wasted, and the crowning joy of womanhood denied me, yet I can, God helping me, improve the future by making myself useful to others, and, in so far as I am able, atone for the past. A word from you will greatly comfort me.

"Very truly, yours, Isabel Coolidge.

"New York, Dec. 15, 1877"

"Poor child! she was good at heart after all, only it was so covered up by ambition and pride that no one was conscious of it," Brownie said, her tears falling fast.

"It is a very earnest, humble letter, and I honor her more to-day than I did when she stood so high in society," Adrian replied, heartily.

"How submissively yet hopelessly she speaks of her love for Sir Charles."

"Yes, poor fellow, this trouble has been a severe blow to him also," said her husband.

"I think I shall drive over to Lady Randal's to-day; and, Adrian, do you think there would be any harm in my showing him both these letters?" the young wife asked, with a wistful look in her dark eyes.

"What a forgiving little—or great heart you have, my darling," he said, as he read her thought.

"'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,'" Brownie repeated with great earnestness.

Her husband stooped and kissed her.

"Do as you like, my own; I believe wherever you go you always carry light and joy with you," he said, almost reverently.

Accordingly, while Lord Dunforth took his guests to visit several points of interest which he could best explain to them, Adrian drove his wife over to call on Lady Ruxley, who, since she had lost her charming companion, had taken a deep interest in her crippled nephew, and now resided all the time with the family.

Brownie's visits were always like gleams of sunshine to her, for Lady Randal, since the developments which had resulted in such mortification to her, and in the destruction of so many hopes, had been very melancholy, and kept her own room nearly all the time, seldom seeing visitors, and scarcely ever going abroad.

Her sons were both very kind to her, and exerted themselves

sheer and comfort her, but her spirit had been crushed, and she could not rally from the blow.

As for the young men themselves, they were congenial spirits—two noble sons of a noble father! The tenderest ties of affection had united them from the moment of their first meeting; their hopes, and aspirations, and sympathies were the same, and wherever they went their aim was to do good.

Sir Charles had opened his heart at once to his brother, and now felt that it would be difficult to live without him. He consulted him regarding every matter of business, upon every alteration and improvement of the estate, and found his suggestions and advice invaluable.

As soon as he felt he could do so, without offending Herbert, he had proposed taking him to a noted surgeon in Paris to see if anything could be done to remedy the deformity which was so wearisome to himself and so unsightly to others.

The result had been beyond their expectations, although the operation had involved infinite pain and patience. The twisted foot and leg had been straightened, and that bowed head lifted, until the young man could walk erect like others. But the withered hand, of course, could not be restored, though the great surgeon had said much more could have been done for him had he been treated in his early youth. This intelligence the brothers did not impart to their mother, willing to save her an added pang while she was suffering so much.

The cripple's health had improved greatly since he had been able to have plenty of outdoor exercise, and his face lost much of that deep sadness which had so touched Brownie's tender heart when she first saw him, but there was always a wistful look about his eyes which told of a life that had had but little of joy in it.

Adrian's wife Herbert Randal considered the essence of perfection, and he spent many hours at her charming home, and

often accompanied her upon her errands of mercy among the poor, while she valued him among her choicest friends.

Sir Charles also had the most profound respect for her, and to-day, as she drove up to their elegant residence, he sprang to assist her to alight, a most cordial welcome on his lips and shining in his eyes.

She lingered a moment in the hall with him, and putting her two letters in his hands, said:

"Go away by yourself and read these carefully, while I make my call upon your mother and Lady Ruxley, and then come and tell me if *you* can forgive as *I* do."

He looked at her a moment in astonishment, then at the address upon the back of each letter. In an instant the color flamed into his face as he recognized the handwriting upon one; he lifted his head haughtily, his lip curled just a trifle in scorn, then, turning without a word, he conducted her to Lady Ruxley's apartments, dispatched a servant to tell his mother that Mrs. Dredmond had called, and quickly withdrew with a strange quickening of his heart-pulses.

Herbert had already taken Adrian off to inspect a new conservatory which was being built.

An hour passed, which Brownie made bright and cheerful for Lady Ruxley, Lady Randal having sent regrets that she was not able to see visitors that morning. Then the gentlemen all came in together.

Sir Charles appeared very thoughtful, but there was a brighter and more hopeful gleam in his eye than there had been for many a day.

He drew Mrs. Dredmond one side as soon as he could do so without attracting too much notice.

"Thank you," he said, as he gave back her letters. "They have comforted me greatly, for I had felt, as she says, as if the crowning joy of life was to be denied me forever."

"And now?" Brownie asked, eagerly.

"What! can *you* wish *her* happiness?" he demanded, more in reply to her eager look than her words.

"Ah, yes, poor child, her suffering has been worse than mine. We do not any of us know our own weakness until we have been tempted. You and I might fall even lower than Isabel did under some peculiar temptation, and shall we presume to judge one who trusted in her own weak strength, and who, now sorrowing, has found, if I am not mistaken, a stronger arm to lean upon?"

"What a peace-maker you are, Mrs. Dredmond—you conquer us all. You take a very sweet way to be revenged upon your enemies," Sir Charles exclaimed, with a suspicious moisture in his fine eyes.

"I do not believe in that element at all," she replied, gently, "but if I could win Isabel's love, and see you both happy, I should ask for no greater triumph."

"What greater triumph could any one have than to make a friend of an enemy?" the young man asked, smiling; then he added, gravely: "I think by another year I may visit the United States—it is always best to let patience have its perfect work, you know, then, if it shall have accomplished its mission, there may be happiness for two more human beings in this world."

Brownie's face fairly shone at his words, then, seeing her husband approaching, she shook him heartily by the hand, and bidding the others good-morning, went away, leaving the house brighter for her coming.

The young husband and wife rode in silence for several minutes. Then Adrian, suddenly bending forward, scanned the fair, beautiful face eagerly.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, with a fond, bright smile.

He bent and touched her forehead with his lips.

"God bless you, my own wife!" was his reverend benediction.

He had caught Sir Charles' last words, and knew that Brownie had accomplished her mission.

And with him we also say "God bless her," and all other pure, true women who carry out in their daily lives the song of the angel host on Bethlehem's plains, "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

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